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BLACKSTONE HAVEN

POWER OF INSTINCT

TAIGE CRENSHAW

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Power of Instinct

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Warning: This book contains sexually explicit content which is only suitable for mature readers. This story has been rated *Total-e-burning*.

Blackstone Haven

Power of Instinct

Taige Crenshaw

Dedication

To my mother, who has always been my number one fan. Although you are no longer with me, I know you are smiling down at me getting published. To Marilyn my sister and second mother who has always believed in me. To my lunch buddies who listen to me ramble on about my writing ideas.

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Chapter One

The usual rhythm of kneading did nothing to calm Ian McIntyre. He went through the motions, but something was off. He stiffened.

“You really should lock your doors, Ian. Someone might just wander in.”

At the sound of Sinai Blackstone’s voice, Ian gritted his teeth. He continued working, making Ianis B Special—the intricate dessert that was his most popular seller. He listened as Sinai moved around the kitchen. For the last few months, he had become used to her coming by in the mornings before he opened or anyone else arrived. He didn’t need to see her to know she was making herself a cup of tea with a dollop of honey and a stick of cinnamon. Next, she would take a dish and help herself to the same pastry she had every day. The scrape of a plate reached his ears. Sinai came back into view.

He took in her honey-skinned beauty. Her highly carved cheeks, full nose and round chin all blended together to create a minxish sexiness. A smug smile spread over her lush lips. She walked towards him with a graceful, sensual movement that seemed to create a beat that resonated in him. He clenched his fist as heat flooded low in his gut. Her fragrance of coconut and shea butter came to him over all the scents in the bakery. Her wild, kinky curls were pulled back into her usual braid, taming them. His cock hardened painfully. Then rage pulsed in his blood. She put down her tea and pastry, taking a seat on the stool across from him.

Ian ignored her, bending his head to make pastries. After a few moments, not hearing her usual sounds of pleasure as she ate and drank, he looked at her. There was an expression he couldn’t define on her face. It made him uncomfortable. It was as if she could see all that he was. That was not something he ever wanted. Especially from her. A stronger flash of annoyance filled him. Sinai blinked, her thick curly lashes fanning briefly over her amber eyes.

“You’re not to blame for what happened with *The Klionhs*,” Sinai said softly.

Ian’s fingers squished in the dough. Years ago, when they had been in college, he and his friends had created *The Klionhs*—a gene-altering drug. They had been young and foolish, blinded by the idea of getting into the genetic code and manipulating it. They had succeeded more than they could have imagined. *The Klionhs* enhanced the user, giving them super-

human power and strength as well as a few other things. Basically, anyone given the drug would become a finely-tuned assassin, one who would kill and kill well. They would be able to live a normal life and, when needed, be called upon. When they realised it was deadly, they had created the antidote and destroyed the formula. They had vowed never to reveal the formula to anyone. After college they had thought it was all forgotten. It wasn't. A few months ago they realised they had been given *The Klionhs* without their knowledge and were being used as guinea pigs by Dr Abrams – a man they all despised.

Ian slowly released it and went over to the sink. Mechanically, he turned on the water and washed his hands. A hand gripped his arm. Ian studied the short nails and delicate-looking fingers. Raising his head, he narrowed his eyes. Sinai didn't back down. She held on to his arm and turned him to face her. Ian turned off the faucet and let her move him. He leant back against the counter. Sinai crowded close to him.

"Whatever happened, that was –"

"Stay the fuck out of it." He cut her off, jerking his arm from her hold.

Sinai's amber eyes narrowed, and she stepped closer. Her scent filled his senses. Ian kept his control, refusing to let her see how she affected him.

"Stop being a fucking ass and I will," Sinai countered.

Ian crossed his arms over his chest. "You act like we're friends, Sinai. You hate my guts, and the feeling...well, you can guess how I feel."

Sinai turned away. Ian reached for her, but stopped himself. He didn't have anything to say. He had been attracted to her since they were kids. They had grown up in Blackstone Haven together. Their families' histories could be traced back for generations. Next to the Blackstones, his family was the oldest in the town. As children Sinai and he had been friends, and close, but when they had become teenagers, that had changed. Even as a teenager, he'd known they could never be together. Although he didn't know all the details of her family's legend, he knew enough to know that wanting her was an exercise in futility. He'd left for college, and then set out to build his life away from Blackstone Haven, and especially from Sinai.

Yet the town had called to him, and he had returned to make his home in Blackstone Haven. He had known he had to keep her at a distance, for his own good. He chose to fight with her instead of giving in to his baser instincts. He would never admit it aloud, but he looked forward to their battles of wits. It was true they liked to bicker. Yet, in the last few

months, it had grown more vicious than usual. Ian blamed *The Klionhs*. He supposed it was due to whatever side-effects the drug had. Knowing Dr Abrams, he wouldn't have cared what happened because of his secretive experiments on Ian and the other members of Conundrum. Dr Abrams might have got rid of the nasty side-effect of death, but this not-being-comfortable-in-his-own-skin feeling was getting to Ian.

Sinai's voice caught his attention. "I don't hate you, Ian. It's just —"

He waited for her to finish. She didn't, instead walking over to her tea and pastry. Sinai braced her hand on the table, her back stiff. Ian tightened his arms around his chest. He would not give in to the temptation and go to her. Sinai looked back, her amber eyes solemn.

"Some things are best the way they are." Sinai shrugged.

Anger blasted through him. He trembled with it.

"I don't want you here, Sinai. You're not welcome. Get out," he said softly.

Sinai drew in a harsh breath, and hurt flashed in her gaze. Then it was gone. Her expression blanked, and she looked him up and down coolly. She turned and walked away. Her gait was slow, not rhythmic. The door closed behind her softly and somehow feeling final. Ian took a step and picked up the huge bowl with the dough and pitched it across the room at the freezer door. It crashed into the metal and left a dent. He gripped the edge of the table and growled low in his throat. His skin was sensitised, and a rippling sensation was just below the surface. Taking a few deep breaths, he fought for control.

Pull it together, Ian. Come on, you can do this.

After a few moments, he calmed, then straightened. On steady feet, he went to the mess. Bending, he hefted the bowl and put it in the sink next to the freezer. He glanced up and stopped at the sight of his reflection. The hard lines of his face and expression seemed like they were those of a stranger. Turning in a swift motion, he kicked up and hit the freezer. It gave. Ian lowered his foot, dispassionately studying the hole in the door.

"Fuck," he said softly.

Something flashed in front of him. Instinctively, he snatched at the air, one hand at a time. Sighing, he looked at the two bars of soap he held. It was Ilian Blackstone's way of telling him to stop swearing. She was Sinai's mother, but the Blackstone clan and his were close and saw each other as family. She did to him and the McIntyre clan the same as she would to her own kids and other family members when they swore. Ilian only heard if you swore. She didn't hear anything else of your conversation unless you wanted her to. Sinai

probably had her own bar of soap. At the thought of her, he flashed to her hurt expression and the look in her eyes. Ian clenched his fists, squashing the soap.

“What the hell happened here?” Wesley McCarty asked.

Ian ignored him and turned, putting the mushy soap in the sink. He could hear each of Wesley’s steps as he came closer.

Wesley whistled, then said, “Wow. The bowl must be heavier than it looks to make that hole.”

Ian looked at the bowl then turned. “Yeah. I had no idea.”

Wesley’s ice blue eyes narrowed. Ian silently cursed. Wesley knew him well. A flash of white made him grab again. A hand met his. Ian glanced at Wesley as they both held an edge of the soap.

Wesley looked surprised, then took a shuddering breath. “I’ll never get used to this increased speed.”

Ian made a sound of agreement, relieved at the ready excuse. Wesley studied the hole in the fridge, then returned his attention to Ian.

“The hole is because of the increased strength and speed. It’s the same as what I can do with a knife.” It wasn’t a question.

He knew Wesley was referring to effects *The Klionhs* had had on him so far—the increased speed and strength. Ian shrugged, not saying anything either way. Let Wesley believe what he chose.

“I know I haven’t cursed, at least not today. So this must be for you.” Wesley raised an eyebrow, nodding at the soap.

He let it go. Ian took it and put it in the sink with the others. Wesley chuckled and went to work. Water came as Wesley washed his hands, then it stopped. The sound of his getting another bowl with dough came, and then the *thunk* as he put it on the table. Ian glanced out of the window. The area was just starting to bustle.

“Where’s Sinai? Did she get a call?” Wesley asked.

Ian turned and noted Wesley was gesturing to the untouched cup of tea and Ianis B Special. Sinai would never have ordinarily left it unfinished. Although she was usually gone by the time Wesley arrived, he knew she came by each day. Ian walked over and picked up the cup and plate. Silently, he took them to the sink.

“Ian, what did you do?” Wesley asked.

"Nothing. What business is it of yours, anyway?"

"I need to know how pissed off my woman is going to be later," Wesley said.

Ian rolled his eyes. Ever since Wesley had hooked up with Peyton, Sinai's sister, a few months ago, he had been asking him the same thing on a daily basis. At first, he hadn't thought anything of the question, just answered. But once it had become daily, he'd asked why Wesley wanted to know, and then wished he hadn't. He so did not need to know that when Sinai was really pissed off, she complained to Peyton. Peyton then got upset, which in turn led to really good sex between her and Wesley. It was her way of working out her frustration. The only good thing was that Wesley blushed when he asked Ian. He enjoyed teasing him about it. Ian went to stand facing him.

"Take some vitamins and drink lots of water," Ian suggested.

"Thank you," Wesley whispered, his cheeks red and a smug smile on his face.

"You know you're sick, right?"

"I don't want to ever get well," Wesley said as he made pastries.

"Just don't come in here late tomorrow," Ian warned with a chuckle.

"That only happened once. And since you aren't paying me, I will do as I please," Wesley said cheerfully.

Ian sighed long and loud as he started to make more pastries. Wesley was right—he came by in the mornings and helped him out at the bakery. They both knew he didn't actually need the help, but Wesley did it so they could hang out. They were close friends, and these last few years they hadn't had much chance to be around each other, between their busy schedule and Ian being in Blackstone.

Now Conundrum—the business they had founded which was known for cutting edge technology and scientific discoveries—had moved their base of operations here to Blackstone Haven, they had been able to spend more time together. They had finally finished constructing the main building of Conundrum, so Wesley would leave after lunch to go there to work. There was still work to do on the other buildings, which would be completed in the next month or so.

Ian had an office there also, since he was still a partner in the company. He didn't plan on using it. Pandora was trying to entice him to come back to work in the daily operations of the business, but he wasn't going to let her. He was happy with his bakery and the little he did for Conundrum. Ian glanced at the clock, noting the time.

"Ah...someone must be talking about sex again. Wes is blushing like a virgin," a husky voice said.

"And we know good and well he isn't," a deep voice replied.

"There goes the blush again. We've got to figure out how he does that. I swear, he's going to burn up one day," another similar deep voice said.

They were just in time. Ian's lips twitched as he turned. Pandora Zahi, who had spoken first, walked over. She met his eyes, studied him, then squeezed his shoulder. He could feel her power soothing across his unsettled soul. She let go and then went to wash her hands. Sin Dubhán slapped Wesley on the shoulder then joined Pandora. His twin brother, Savage Dubhán, touched Wesley's cheek. Wesley pushed his hand away. Savage shook his head and went over to the others. Moments later, they joined them in making Ianis B Special. With the four of them working with him, it was like old times. The 'five brains' were back together. It felt really good to have his friends with him again.

Absently, Ian listened as they laughed and teased each other. It was a side that most people didn't see of Pandora, Sin and Savage. He and Wesley were the friendliest of the group. The others were more standoffish. Ian picked up the tray of completed pastries and went to the oven. He reached straight out and opened the oven, then slid the platter in. Shutting the door, he glanced at his face in the shiny glass front. There was a grimace on his face he didn't like. Hurt amber eyes filled his thoughts. Ian pushed the memories away and went back to work.

Later in the day, Ian waved at Ethan Barons, who was busy prepping a cake for a wedding. Ethan acknowledged him and went back to his task. Ian studied the man as he worked with a steady hand. The design of the cake was impressive, and the flowers he was piping on by hand were perfect. Ian was pleased he had decided to hire him. He went to the swinging doors and pushed them open. He glanced at the tables beyond the counter and noted most of them were filled. The waiters and waitresses were bustling around, delivering orders. Looking down to the other end of the counter, he saw the line for the takeouts was moving at a steady pace.

"Go home, already." The melodious voice sounded exasperated.

Ian smiled and looked at Virginia Anderson, who walked over to him. He had known Virginia for years, and she had been married to his brother. A shaft of sorrow filled him. His brother had died, and Virginia had taken it hard.

Ian had recently hired her as a manager when he had decided to expand. He had bought the business next door, doubling the square footage of Sinfully McIntyre. Having seating in the bakery to make it a sit-down sort of dessert restaurant was paying off. And having another pastry chef made him able to take on more custom jobs. Virginia taking over managing the staff and front part of the business had given him time to bake and handle the behind-the-scenes details.

"Go home, Ian. I've got this." She gave him a gentle push.

"Who's the boss?" Ian asked.

"Out here, me," Virginia replied calmly.

Ian snorted. She was right. That was the one thing she insisted on. No micro-management from him, or else she would quit. He had agreed, and knowing her as well as he did, he knew she would not fail. Ian sighed and glanced around again. He didn't want to go home.

"Why don't you go and apologise for being an ass?" Virginia asked.

Ian gave her a look. Virginia was unfazed. He should have known she would find out what had happened between him and Sinai. The two of them were good friends.

"I have nothing to apologise for," Ian growled.

He turned, going to the door leading to the back.

"Keep telling yourself that!" Virginia called.

Ian ignored her and went into the kitchen. He stomped to the exit.

"Hey. What's got you pissed?" Ethan asked

He didn't answer going out of the door. Outside, he took a breath. The late May evening was nice, not too hot or cool. Ian headed to his car and got in. He drove on automatic pilot to his house.

I don't have anything to be sorry for. It's better this way. Keeping Sinai at a distance was best for them both. Decisively, he got out of his vehicle.

Days later, Ian glared at the clock, then went back to making deserts.

"She's doing this to irritate me. But she is not going to win. Damn her," he growled.

His hand flashed out, and he caught the soap. He flicked it into the full sink, then went back to stirring the batter. Irritated, he looked at the pile of soap in the sink.

"It's Sinai's fault I'm cursing. Your fucking dau—" Ian snatched the soap, then threw it on the pile. "Your daughter is a pain in my ass."

He snatched the soap as it appeared and threw it with the others.

"Ass is a body part," Ian pointed out.

"Not the way you're using it. Stop swearing," Ilian said in his thoughts.

Ian grunted and went back to stirring. After some time, he put the bowl down and sat. Rubbing his fingers along the bridge of his nose, Ian glanced at the clock again. All the times they had fought, Sinai had always come back the next day. Then they would do it again. But this time she was staying away. He hadn't caught a glimpse of her for almost a week. She was trying to get to him.

At the sound of the door opening, he stood and returned to work. He answered absently to Wesley. Then, as the others came in, he grunted. They all gave him space. Ian stifled a growl. He knew he had been a jerk the last few days, but couldn't figure out what to do. Mechanically, he'd worked through the day.

"My kitchen. Out, snarky puss," Ethan said.

Ian was surprised it was already six. He cleaned up quickly, ignoring Ethan as he worked around him.

"You really need to get the stick out of your ass," Ethan said.

Ian turned to him and snarled. Ethan was unfazed. He flipped him the bird and continued mixing his cake.

"Take your bad attitude and get out of my kitchen," Ethan warned.

"This is my business. And you work for me," Ian countered.

Ethan set down the spoon carefully. "That can be changed."

"Ge—" Ian stopped himself before he said it.

Ethan raised an eyebrow, as if daring him. Ian shook his head.

"You're either fearless or have a death wish," Ian said.

"You can't kill me," Ethan said matter-of-factly.

Ian blew out a breath, knowing he was right. He touched Ethan's shoulder. Ethan nodded quickly, acknowledging it. Then Ian released him and ran his hands through his hair.

"I'm going home," he said.

He glanced at the swinging door. It was his usual ritual to go out front and check on things, although he knew it wasn't needed. Ian instead left.

A while later, he pulled up to a house and got out. With determined strides, he went up the steps then across the porch. He frowned as the door swung open without him touching it. He entered and closed it behind him. He took the stairs two at a time and strode left on the landing to a closed door. He opened it, went in, and approached the bed. Standing over it, he stared down at the sleeping woman.

Sinai's hair spread loose under her. The pale yellow camisole she wore complemented her skin. The sweetheart neckline gave him an appealing view of the top of her breasts. Ian licked his lips. He wanted to pull it down and suckle her. He clenched his fist.

I'm not here for that. He would first tell her about leaving her door open, then demand to know why she hadn't come by the bakery. He was not going to apologise.

Ian leant down. Her scent of coconut and shea butter filled his senses. He stiffened as another scent, just under it, came to him. Ian's body rippled, and he reached for her. Sinai's hand flashed up, and she levelled her gun at him. Ian made a flowing motion of his hand and took it from her. He grabbed her with his other hand and jerked her off the bed then put his face close to hers.

"How the fuck could you?" he roared.

He released her in a motion too fast to see, then swatted the soap that appeared. He placed the gun on the bedside table, then grabbed her. He gripped her by the shoulder and shook her. Sinai didn't fight him. Defiance was in her gaze.

"I did it to protect you."

"Protect me?" he spat.

Sinai growled. "Yes, protect you."

Ian shuddered uncontrollably. He let her go and ran back out of the door.

"Ian!" Sinai screamed.

Ignoring her, he ran down the hall, then leapt. He landed on his feet at the base of the stairs. He glanced back at her. She was standing at the top of the stairs, her chest heaving, making the pale camisole shirt move. Boy shorts of the same colour showcased her long legs. He raised his head and made a sound deep in his chest.

"Stay inside," he warned.

Turning, he ran to the door, yanked it open, and ran across the porch. He leapt and hit the ground running. Heading for the trees, he ran and ran. Stopping in a clearing, he put his head back and looked at the sky as he let out a roar of fury.

* * * *

Sinai covered her mouth with her hand. The rage on his face scared her. Ian turned and ran to the door, leaving.

"I did it to protect you." Sinai whispered.

Everything she had done these last few months had been unravelled in one moment. She didn't know how he had got through the wards of her house, or how he had seen the truth. Sinai ran down the stairs and swiftly out of the door. She caught a glimpse of Ian's back as he leapt off the porch. She followed him as he ran into the forest behind her house. He was moving so fast she lost sight of him. The sound of his roar echoed through the trees. The noise stilled her in her tracks. Leaning against a tree, Sinai clutched the bark.

"It was all to protect you."

A sound made her turn. She was knocked off her feet. Sinai gasped as she hit the ground hard. A large paw pressed in the centre of her chest. Raising her eyes, she took in the white tiger. The white and black stripes stretched across a face that was deadly, yet beautiful. It raised its lip in a snarl, then lowered its head. Sharp teeth came close to her lips.

Sinai's heart was steady as she met its gaze. The tiger leaned its head to the side, studying her.

"Let me go." Sinai's voice was as calm as her heartbeat.

The tiger roared in her face. Her ears rang with the sound, and the hair on her body stood up.

"Come back," she said in that same calm tone.

It roared again, then in a blink, fur became skin and the paw a hand. He laid against her, his naked skin hot to the touch. Sinai cradled him close. He raised his head. Furious steel grey eyes locked with hers.

Chapter Two

“Ian—”

“Shut up, Sinai. My control is weak right now,” Ian said as he shuddered.

Sinai went silent. Ian took a breath, then his body rippled. A brush of fur tickled her fingers and skin again. Sinai shifted under his naked body.

“Mate,” Ian growled, a deep, bassy sound.

Sinai stilled. Ian put his nose into her neck and inhaled deeply. Sinai shuddered, and her pussy flooded. Ian shifted his hips, and she widened her legs. He rested against her mound. Sinai whimpered at the hard length pressing against her. Ian stiffened, then started to withdraw. Sinai held him fiercely, refusing to let go.

“We’re not doing this,” Ian said in a rough voice.

Sinai turned to him. His breath ghosted over her lips. She licked them. Ian made a rumble deep in his throat. Sinai closed the distance between them. Ian drew his head back, shaking it.

“No. I’m not going to fuck you. You lied to me, Sinai. What did you do to mask that you’re mine from me?” Ian slapped away a bar of soap.

Then he braced his arms over her head. He pushed his upper body off her. The lower half pressed against her wet pussy. Sinai stifled a gasp.

“Sinai,” he said sharply.

She focused on his face. His jaw clenched. Sinai touched his cheek.

“I put a spell on you that made you hate me.”

“Why? How long?” His eyes narrowed.

“To protect you.”

“I don’t need you protecting me. What exactly were you protecting me from?” Ian asked.

Sinai didn’t want to say. Ian growled again.

“Fine. From the Blackstone Legacy. You don’t need all that with all you’re going through with *The Klionhs* crap. I did it for you,” Sinai defended.

“You kept the truth about us from me. You’re my motherfucking mate, Sinai. You know what that means to my kind.”

Ian swatted the soap away while balancing on one hand. Sinai licked her lips at the flex of his muscles. He put the other hand down again by her head.

"I do. But I couldn't...no...*wouldn't* let you have to deal with the legacy on top of everything else."

"So you were willing to be a martyr to supposedly spare me," Ian stated.

Sinai winced at how that sounded. She shook her head.

"No. I don't plan to die."

"But you would if you face your legacy alone."

"No. We already faced what we needed to face. At least for a year. The demon only picks one of us a year."

"Explain."

Sinai gladly did. Maybe it would calm him down. "The demon only picks one of us a year to battle with. It can happen any time after our twenty-fifth birthday."

Ian looked contemplative. "How many times has he called you?"

"Only once before, about three years ago, when I was twenty-eight."

"But you don't know if you will be called. I know some of your family do not survive when you're called to face this legacy without your other half. I've seen what it does to the family, eating away at each of you, and you can do nothing about it. So you had to face this alone on your birthday for six years. Six years, when you didn't have to."

"Not that long. I didn't know before about us." Sinai bit her lip.

"When did you know?" Ian demanded.

"Right after Wesley came to Blackstone Haven," she admitted.

Ian scoffed. "So you didn't know before. But it doesn't matter *when* you knew. It matters that you knew and kept it from me." His tone was soft and deadly.

"I'd do it again," Sinai said firmly.

"We're at the end of May, and your birthday is the middle of August. We have a little over three months to prepare for this demon. What is its name?"

"I don't know. And like I told you, it's done for this year. Besides, even if it wasn't, he doesn't start so early with his scare tactics," Sinai said.

"Never assume anything. Always be prepared. Give me his name."

"I don't know it," Sinai replied. At his look, she growled, "I don't. All we know is he's a death demon. Once he actually takes the one he has chosen, we all get the knowledge of his name. But before and after that, we don't know it."

Ian frowned. "Why?"

Sinai shrugged. "I don't know. It just is."

"You will fill me in on all you know. But now, tell me your part of the legacy."

Sinai scowled, but did as he said. *"With seven of seven born from seven, various choices will be made. Each child born of seven will have a choice put in his or her path, a choice that will lead to salvation or extinction."*

"Not the family one. Your personal one," Ian snarled.

Sinai spoke, her tone unconsciously taking on a lyrical tone. *"A familiar man of two souls will walk beside you.*

He will protect you with his animal soul.

His human spirit will shelter you when you most need.

Before the final step to merge your body and soul is taken, a choice must be made.

Have care what you choose, for it can mean your life and, ultimately, your soul.

Death stalks you, waiting for the weakness to strike and take what you hold most dear.

It is through his surety of spirit you will be guided to the right path.

Do not doubt him, and give him your all.

The familiar man of your past will also be your future.

Through his two souls, you will find your way from the dark."

Ian was silent after she had spoken. Suddenly, in an effortlessly boneless movement, he stood. He picked her up and set her on her feet. He turned and walked away.

"Ian."

He stopped, but didn't turn. Sinai took a step to him.

"Don't go."

"You knew before a few months ago. Knew all this time you were mine, and I was yours," Ian gritted out.

"No, I didn't. I suspected it might be you. But I didn't know for sure until a few months ago." Sinai's heart raced. She had to convince him of that.

"You put a spell on me to make me hate you. I thought it was *The Klionhs* that changed me and made me so nasty to you. Yes, we've always fought, but nothing like these last few months."

There was a note of loss in his voice that made her heart clench. Yes, she'd cast a spell to stop him from knowing. There was nothing she could say to that. But her reasons were sound. Ian turned, and his steel grey eyes seemed to glow briefly, then returned to normal.

"My beast wants to claim you as its mate."

Sinai's pussy spasmed at the thought of having him. She'd never expected to have him. Ian's next words were delivered softly and coldly.

"But I control my other half. I will not give in to that baser instinct."

He turned from her and continued walking away. Sinai's breath caught, and she reached out to him.

"Ian, let me hold you. I know you're not sleeping. Let me keep vigil for you, just for tonight. I won't let anything happen to you, or let you go anywhere—" Sinai cut herself off.

She had already revealed too much. He stopped, stiffening.

"You've been spying on me," he accused.

"Keeping watch. Your restlessness called to me," Sinai admitted.

He glanced at her sharply, then studied her. Sinai waited for his decision. Ian turned to face her, coming towards her in a roll of predatory power. Sinai stood her ground, although her instinct screamed for her to run. He closed in. The musky scent of earth and nature filled her senses. It was all Ian, and what he was. Sinai held still, refusing to shudder under it. Ian leaned in to her, inhaled deeply, then purred. It vibrated through her soul. Sinai locked her knees as they went weak. Ian flashed her an arrogant smile. He stepped to the side and padded soundlessly the way he had come. Following him, Sinai stared at the flex of his naked back and ass. Her hand ached to cup his butt and squeeze. She wanted to lick the back of his neck, across his shoulders, and down the centre of his back, then nibble on the nerves at the base of his spine.

Ian started to run. She matched him unconsciously, stride for stride. Before she knew it, her house came into view and they raced up the walk, steps, and inside. The door shut behind her. They went up the stairs without slowing and down the hall into her bedroom. Ian stopped, and she barely kept from running into his back. Ian went into the bathroom and closed the door. In moments, she heard the shower running. Sinai took a seat next to the

glass door leading to the balcony. Absently, she looked out at it, shrouded in moonlight which made everything glow. She got lost in the beauty of the night. Then a sound behind her made her turn. Ian towelled his hair, then threw the towel at the hamper she kept close to the doorway.

He walked over to her king-sized bed and slipped between the burnt orange sheets on the side closest to the glass door leading to the balcony.

Ian studied her silently, then spoke.

"You don't need to sit in the chair all night to watch out. The house is warded to protect you. And you'll feel me if I get up."

She frowned. "What?"

"It's the effect of feeling your mate. It's why you felt my restlessness. Probably why you've felt out of sorts and out of control. It wouldn't be this bad if you had let things play out as you should have," he stated.

She heard the rebuke in his tone. Sinai couldn't disagree. She had been feeling weird lately, but had shrugged it off as her approaching birthday, even though there was nothing to worry about after Peyton had faced the demon. After their twenty-fifth birthday, they all dreaded it when it came. Silently, Sinai walked to the bed. She motioned for Ian to move. He put his hand under his head. She took that to mean he wasn't moving and frowned. She was supposed to be looking after him. With him facing the balcony, it was more like he was protecting her. Sinai narrowed her eyes.

"Get in the bed, Sinai," Ian growled.

Sinai stiffened. No one told her what to do. She turned to go back to the chair and gasped as he touched her. Before she could blink, she found herself on her back on the bed, on the opposite side of him, away from the balcony. Sinai looked at his naked back. She curled her fist, tempted to smack him between the shoulder blades. Instead, she tried to relax. She shifted, finding she couldn't get comfortable. Her body ached, and her skin felt strange. She stifled a gasp as Ian moved quickly, pulling her in to his body. Instantly, she felt better.

"I don't know why I feel like this." Sinai frowned. "I don't like it."

"If you weren't so stubborn, you wouldn't be feeling like this. It's called *Skin Famislk*. Usually, a mated pair goes through this stage when they first meet, getting to know each other's skin, the feel of it under their fingers. They touch often to get it down. As the stages of

mating progress, it becomes more manageable, but it doesn't go away. It's why mated pairs touch each other so much. We would have already solved this issue if you hadn't tried to be in control, as usual. Since you denied the need to be close like this, skin to skin, you're feeling this way now. It's your own fault," Ian griped.

Sinai pushed at his shoulders. She ignored the silken feel of his skin. Ian sighed, then shifted back.

"Fine. Be that way." Ian turned his back on her, facing the balcony again.

Sinai lay there, her body once again feeling sensitised. Making a sound of frustration she scooted over to Ian and fitted her body against his back. She shuddered as they touched. She put her hand on his waist. Anxiously, she waited to see what he would say, but he said nothing. He took her hand and laced his fingers with hers. She rubbed her cheek against his back.

"Go to sleep," Ian said.

Sinai sighed and relaxed. Ian made a deep rumbling sound. It followed her to sleep.

Sinai woke suddenly. Sitting up, she glanced frantically around the room. Ian sat in the chair right next to the bed.

"I'm leaving for the bakery," he said quietly.

He stood and went to the door.

"Ian."

"Don't, Nai. Nothing you can say right now will make this better." He braced his hands on the doorframe.

Then he straightened and left the room.

"You called me Nai'." Sinai smiled as she watched him leave.

Ian hadn't called her the familiar name that her family and friends used since they were teenagers. A giddy feeling filled her. He hadn't forgiven her yet, but at least she was no longer 'Sinai'. She had grown to hate when he called her that in his tone that created distance between them. Smiling, Sinai laid back on the bed. She didn't have to work today, and after last night, she was grateful. She relaxed in bed. An hour and a half later, she watched the sun rise through the glass door leading to the balcony. Sinai got up, put on her robe, and headed downstairs. She went to the kitchen, but stopped when she saw who was there, sitting at her island.

"Well, well. Look who's back," Sinai said as she went to the stove.

She made her cup of tea and sat facing the woman. Sinai took a sip of her tea, waiting.

"You really shouldn't have cast that spell on Ian. It will have repercussions." Amber eyes watched her calmly.

Sinai put her cup down and sighed. "I thought Grayson was the precog of the family who could see possible futures."

The woman's expression did not change. Sinai pursed her lips, looking at the face so much like her own.

"No way you could have read my thoughts from wherever the hell you came from. And I'm blocking everyone in the family from what is going on," Sinai said.

The woman snatched the soap that appeared and put it on the table between them.

"You better watch it, or Mom will come and clean your mouth out herself." The woman gave her a look. "And I know everything you've been up to."

"You know that's freaky, right?" Sinai asked.

"I know," Ryssa Blackstone, her older sister, replied in the same calm manner.

Sinai rolled her eyes. It was irritating how calm she was. It was Ryssa's usual way, and none of the siblings tried to shake that damn infallible calm. Ryssa loved to say being the second oldest to such pains in the butt was why she was not easily shocked and needed to be calm, or else worrying about their shenanigans would have put her into an early grave already.

"Where have you been for the last year and a half, Ryssa?"

Ryssa didn't say anything. She took another drink of her tea. Sinai wasn't just trying to change the subject. She was concerned. They all had been. Ryssa had gone away to work with Doctors Without Borders, but she hadn't told any of them where she was going. She had blocked her location from everyone. With Ryssa's powers, they knew how dangerous it was for her to be working with the organisation. When her birthday had approached in January and she hadn't come home, they had all been concerned. On the day of her birthday, she had only contacted them briefly telepathically to say she was fine. They'd heard nothing from her since then. Ryssa showing up now had to be for a reason.

"Changing the subject won't work," Ryssa warned.

"I'm not," Sinai insisted and cocked her head. "The others don't know you're back."

Sinai listened to the flow of conversations that usually went on telepathically among the family. There was no hitch of excitement about Ryssa's return.

"No. I needed to see you first. I knew from the time I hit town what you were up to. Little sis, you are in so much trouble," Ryssa said.

In that instant, the telepathic signals changed to a buzz. She heard her mom calling her.

"You rat. You told them. But how? They don't know you're back." Sinai frowned.

Ryssa replied, "Nope. Not me. Grayson. She gave me a message for you."

Sinai frowned. Grayson, another of her sisters and the youngest, had left while Peyton was battling the death demon. She hadn't told anyone she was going, and no one had heard from her since then. They had been looking for her.

"Is she okay?" Sinai asked.

"Yep. She's looking into something. She'll be back when it's time," Ryssa said.

Sinai frowned, then asked, "What's the message?"

"Look beyond what the eyes can see," Ryssa replied.

"What the hell does that mean?" Sinai frowned.

"No clue. I'm just the messenger. And, little sis, stop messing with things. Let it play out as it should," Ryssa warned.

"It was to protect him," Sinai defended.

"I know all about *The Klionhs* thing. It still doesn't justify it. You shouldn't have done it. You know that."

Sinai leant back, crossing her arms over her chest. Ryssa was right, but she wasn't going to say that.

"Are you just here to rag on me?"

"You are such a brat." Ryssa laughed.

Sinai laughed with her and stuck out her tongue.

"Time for me to go." Ryssa stood.

"When are you going to tell the fam you're back? When are you going back to work?"

"I'll tell them in a few moments. No one else in Blackstone Haven will know I'm back. I'm not going back to the hospital for another six months. It's how long I put in to be gone. I'm going to take the time," Ryssa replied.

Sinai was shocked. Ryssa was a workaholic and loved her job as the head of the trauma centre for Blackstone Hospital. She was very good at what she did. The weariness Ryssa had

been hiding was present in her voice. Sinai studied her sister and noticed she looked thinner than usual. There was an air about her she couldn't place.

"I'll be okay. I just need some rest," Ryssa said.

For Ryssa to even admit that, Sinai knew she was more tired than she was letting on. Being an empath, Ryssa felt everything from others unless she filtered it. She was also a powerful healer, and she sometimes used her powers till they were so low it drained her strength. It was why they were so concerned about her being with Doctors Without Borders, without her family to help give her strength if she had need. In all the months she had been gone, she'd never once called for their help.

"You really are more powerful with your other half, if you have to go up against him. It's not a guarantee, but it is a chance," Ryssa said.

Sinai glanced at her sharply. The closed look on her face let Sinai know she would not discuss anything else about what she had admitted. Sinai stifled a sigh and went with the change of subject.

"You did it. Three times," Sinai pointed out.

Ryssa glanced through the bay window to the backyard. When she turned back, Sinai caught her breath.

"I'm the only one who has met him more than once and lived through it. I wish I could tell how I did it, but I don't know. Next time, I'm not sure if I will survive. Even if I find my other half between now and then, I won't let him become part of me. I can't, knowing I might lose him."

Sinai frowned. "Ryssa—"

Ryssa cut her off. "I could almost get why you tried to keep Ian from this. But you know Ian, know him as well as you know yourself. Take this gift you have been given by fate and embrace it."

Sinai stood and went to her sister. She gripped her arm. Fear filled her.

"Ryssa, it can happen for you, too," Sinai said.

"If it hasn't by now, it isn't going to. Even if it does, I'm too set in my ways to have some man mucking things up."

"Christ, Ryssa. You're only thirty-five. You're too young to give up."

Ryssa stiffened and glared. "I'm not giving up. I'm just saying I won't be depending on some fucking knight coming to rescue me. I'm going to depend on me. If the death demon

wants to come for me again, this time I'm going to kick his ass and stop this bullshit that has been plaguing our family for so long."

"Your tone didn't even change." Sinai grinned.

Ryssa grunted. Sinai chuckled. Ryssa hadn't even raised her voice.

"We're not talking about me. This is about you and Ian."

"He might forgive me, but he won't trust me that easily," Sinai said.

"And you have the same problem. You both need to get over it and deal with each other. Stop trying to decide who will be top dog," Ryssa said.

"Top dog? Really? That sounds so dirty." Sinai laughed.

"Only to you, perv," Ryssa said.

"It's a gift."

Ryssa walked past her. Sinai trailed her to the front door. Ryssa touched her shoulder, opened the door, then strode down the stairs. She picked up her helmet and gloves, donned them, and swung her leg over her bike. She flipped on the engine. The roar of the bike broke the stillness, then was cut off abruptly. Sinai knew she'd muffled the sound. It was why she hadn't heard her come to the house earlier. Ryssa waved one gloved hand, then pulled out. Sinai went inside.

She thought of her sister's unexpected return and their conversation. Ryssa was correct—she had an issue with trust. Ian also was right that she liked being in control. It was her way, and she wasn't about to change anytime soon. Ian would have to earn her trust and learn to accept her need for control. Sinai went upstairs to dress. She had some errands to run.

"*Sinai.*" Her mom's voice came, then she felt a sense of displacement.

Sinai glanced around her mom's kitchen, then at her. "You could have at least let me dress."

Clothing flowed over her body. Sinai blew out a breath. She winced as her aunts started appearing in the kitchen. Sinai took a seat, knowing there was a lecture coming. She hadn't been called before them since Ian had convinced her it was fine if she used her power to move the Blackstone Mountains to the other side of town. They had been twelve at the time. He had thought it was funny when she later described the lecture she had received. Sinai snorted. She was due for another lecture, and again, it was because of him.

Even older, he is a pain in my butt. Obediently, Sinai listened as her mom started talking.

* * * *

Ian sat back in the chair. The others looked at each other, then back at him. He had called them when he left Sinai's house to meet him at Conundrum. Wesley was the first to break the silence.

"Let me get this straight. You and Sinai are mates. What the hell does that mean? You can't even stand each other." Wesley frowned.

Ian exchanged a glance with the others, then looked back at Wesley. He stood, then shifted. It was smooth and felt like silk as his skin moved to fur. Wesley blinked and didn't make a sound. Ian shifted back and watched Wesley. He took a seat again.

"You're some sort of shifter. Pan has some witchy ability. Are Sin, Savage and I the only ones who don't have some sort of power?" Wesley's tone was steady.

"Um. Not exactly."

Wesley looked at Sin, who had spoken. Ian watched as Sin, then Savage, stood. They took a step back and seemed to disappear.

"What the fuck?" Wesley's hand flashed out, and he put the soap on the table in front of him without looking away from the now empty space where Sin and Savage had been.

Ian already knew what they were. The men shimmered back into view as if shadows were peeling away. Ian figured it was for Wesley's benefit. Usually, you wouldn't have seen them coming.

"What the hell are you?" Wesley snatched another soap as it appeared, setting it down with the other one.

"We're Shadowers."

"I need you to tell me all you know about death demons," Ian interjected.

"Why would they know about them?" Wesley asked, looking at him again.

"It's a sort of demon," Ian replied.

"A death demon?" Sin asked.

Ian turned his attention to him. "Yes. That's what is plaguing the Blackstones. They don't know its name until one of them has to face him. Sinai told me not to worry because, although her birthday is coming, she won't have to face him. He takes on one of them a year. But I want to know about him before next year."

Sin and Savage exchanged a look.

Savage spoke. "Death demons don't work like that. But I'll ask some of them who live in Blackstone."

Ian sat forward, frowning. "There are death demons in Blackstone?"

Sin and Savage nodded.

Ian stared. He knew none of the Blackstones knew that, which in itself was alarming. Ian looked at his friends. Since Sinai and her family didn't know, he wondered how it was possible Sin and Savage did.

"They're a private lot. And since other beings tend to shun them and act strange around them, they think it best to keep under the radar. Like we do," Savage said.

Ian nodded. He knew that as Shadowers, Sin and Savage probably faced lots of prejudice because of what they were.

"You all aren't human, and we're having a conversation like this is normal," Wesley said quietly.

Ian glanced at him sharply. He knew that tone, and it was not a good thing. Wesley turned to Pandora, who was sitting next to him.

"Doesn't it bother you that they aren't human?" Wesley asked.

"No. since they *are* human, but with extras. And so am I." Pan's look was steady and unapologetic.

"What are you?"

"A siren. Do you have a problem with that?"

"You mean like leading men to their death, siren?" Wesley asked in a calm tone.

The others sat forward at that. Pandora watched Wesley and made a tsking sound.

"No. More vicious than that. Maybe you want to try me."

"Maybe I fucking do." Wesley smiled, a cold grin.

He caught the soap that appeared and flung it at Pandora. She waved a hand, and it floated in front of her face. She motioned, and it went to the table next to the others. Wesley stood and pushed back his chair furiously. He left the conference room. The others stared after him, then they all stood, going after him.

"What is your problem, Wesley? Peyton is a witch, and you don't have a problem with that. Why do you have a problem with us being different?" Ian asked.

Wesley turned. "You fucking asshole. All of you have been lying to me for a year. I thought we were friends. Yet, the most important thing about you, I didn't know."

Ian took a shuddering breath. It was similar to what Sinai had done to him. He gripped Wesley's shoulder.

"Sorry, Wes. We should have told you."

The others made sounds of agreement.

"Sorry isn't going to fix this. All of you knew about each other, but not me. What? Because I'm just the human of the bunch I wasn't good enough to be told? Well, I guess we weren't the friends I thought." Wesley shrugged him off.

He gave them a furious look, then walked away. Ian watched as he went down the hall. Reaching the corner, he went right to go to his office. He looked back over his shoulder. Wesley turned in one motion and moved in a blur. The sound of a body hitting the wall reached them. They ran to the corner. Ian rushed forwards and caught Wesley's forearm. He strained to stop him. Wesley had a man raised, holding him by his throat.

"Wes, what are you doing?" Ian asked.

"He fucking drugged Newton?" Wesley asked furiously.

Ian knew Wesley was referring to his dog, which had been drugged when he had first arrived in Blackstone Haven. Ian glanced at the man. His face was partially in the shadows. The man lowered his head, and the light made Ian able to see him. His eyes flashed an almost translucent grey. The man's features and long raven hair hinted at his Latin heritage. His smile was arrogant, then went cold. Before Ian could react, the man made a slowing motion, then punched out, releasing Wesley's grip on his neck. He and Ian went skidding back on the floor. The man watched them, leaning against the wall, unruffled. He studied his nails. Ian narrowed his eyes. He hadn't seen him move and didn't sense him as a shifter. Wesley headed for the man again. Ian went with him. In his gut, he knew the first time Wesley had grabbed the man it was due to the man allowing it. He didn't think the man would again.

"Stop. This is Zyric, the man the government assigned to work with us on *The Klionhs*." Pandora stepped in front of them.

Wesley glared at Zyric. "What did you have to do with what was done with it?"

Zyric didn't answer.

"We'll get to ask Zyric more once he's settled in his office. He has some loose ends to tie up and will be joining us in a few months." Pandora paused, then looked at Zyric. "At that time, he will tell us everything." Her tone was not a request.

Zyric nodded, abruptly straightened from the wall, and walked away. Ian looked after him. Something about Zyric was familiar, but he couldn't place what it was.

"I guess I shouldn't be surprised I wasn't told about him. After all, I seem to be left out of a lot of shit," Wesley said.

Ian turned to him and saw the bars of soap he held. Wesley glared at them all and went back towards his office. Ian watched him and wondered if he should go after him.

"Sin, what's wrong?" Savage asked suddenly, drawing his attention.

Ian looked at Sin and noted he looked confused.

"I'm okay," Sin said slowly. "It's nothing. Just a weird feeling that was not possible."

Savage studied Sin, then turned to Ian. "Should we go deal with Wesley?"

Ian looked in the direction Wesley had gone. He shook his head. "Nah. You know he doesn't usually stay mad long. He'll get over it by the end of the day, then come to us when he's ready to talk."

The others nodded. Wesley was the most even tempered of them, and the quickest to forgive. By the end of the day, they would be back to talking and solving this problem of the Blackstone legacy. Ian turned his attention to Pandora.

"What do you know about this Zyric?"

"Only what I told you."

Ian raised his eyebrow.

Pandora made a frustrated sound. "He doesn't come up in any database anywhere. All I know is, the government sent him here as a sort of liaison. I told you all this already."

Ian nodded. She had. Pandora might not show it, but he could tell Wesley's words had hurt her. It had nothing to do with her empathy. It was more to do with Wesley's words about them not sharing with him. He studied the faces of Sin and Savage and saw it was bothering them, too. Ian was bothered also, but banked on Wesley's forgiving nature.

"It'll work out, guys. Let's just give him some space."

"I'll go check on the death demons," Savage said.

"I've got some work in the lab," Sin said.

They strode away.

"I have some wrangling to do with the bureaucrats," Pandora said.

Ian stifled a smile. Pandora was a hell raiser, and blunt, but she was a hell of a negotiator. That was why they had her as the spokesperson for Conundrum. When people first saw her, they underestimated her because of her beauty, but quickly came to realise how sharp she was. He passed her and squeezed her hand. Pandora returned it and looked at him. Her pale lavender eyes went glassy. She shuddered, then gasped, wrenching away.

"Christ. Don't touch me until the two of you have consummated this shit," Pandora growled.

"Come on. Let me touch you," Ian teased.

Pandora slid away from him. She shook her head and put up a hand in warning. "Don't make me hurt you. Go mess with Sinai's head. You two deserve each other."

Ian chuckled at the disgust in Pandora's tone. The two women didn't get along at all. They had come to blows in their first meeting, and ever since, their interactions had been set. They avoided each other, and when they had to be in the same vicinity, they were kept apart.

"Then again, no one deserves her. I can fix it so you won't have her as a mate," Pandora offered.

Ian sobered. "Don't."

He knew Pandora could, if she chose. Pandora studied him, then sighed.

"I'm not going to interfere. For now. But if she doesn't act right, then I'll do as I see fit," Pandora warned. She walked away.

Ian didn't try to get a stronger promise. He already knew it was the best he was getting. Ian headed for the door. He had a lot he needed to do.

* * * *

Sinai stumbled into her house. The eight-hour lecture her mom and aunts had given her had left her with a headache. When they had finally let her go, instead of zapping back to her house, she had decided to walk home. It was acres between her parents' house and her own home, but she needed the solitude. The sun didn't even bother her. She kept a steady breeze as she walked. Although her headache had eased, she was still smarting about their words of admonishment.

A noise made her frown. She knew her house was warded, and no one could come in past the wards without her permission. Following the sounds, she went towards her pet room. She frowned, realising they hadn't come to greet her. Pushing open the door, Sinai blinked, sure she was seeing things. Golden eyes stared at her haughtily. The Ashera cat arched its back and hissed. Her twin wolves made slight coughing noises that seemed to calm it. The other various species of cats milled around the spacious pen room that usually only housed her wolves. The cages filled with various birds made a loud canopy of sound. Sinai backed out of the room and closed the door slowly.

She stomped back down the hall.

"Ian!" she screamed.

"No need to shout. I'm in here." Ian's voice came from her living room.

"What is Einstein doing with McGee and Reid? Heck, what is your whole animal farm doing with them? You—" Sinai stepped into the living room, then stopped.

She walked over and examined the big screen TV that took up the whole wall between her two bay windows. There was a lot of space between them, meaning that was a whole lot of TV. She had heard tales of Ian's TV from her various family members and friends who went to his house to watch games or a movie. Sinai took a breath, trying to be calm.

"What's going on?" she asked slowly as she turned to Ian.

He was leaning back on her couch, his arms behind his head and his crossed legs extended before him. Her gaze dropped, taking in how his jeans cupped his cock and encased his legs. Heat flooded her. She shifted.

"Since I'm moving in until after your birthday, I'll need my things."

Sinai blinked, sure she had heard him wrong. She shook her head. Ian nodded, a smug smile on his face.

"Hell, no!" Sinai roared.

She smacked away the soap. Ian's hand flashed up, and he caught it. He stood in a lazy motion then walked in a loose-legged gait. Sinai's heart started to race. She felt as if she was being stalked. She stood her ground as Ian walked right up to her.

He leant down and said softly, "Don't test me, Nai."

"You're not moving in here. It's not necessary," she insisted.

Ian's eyes dilated, then he said in a low tone, "Are you challenging me?"

Sinai raised her head. "On this I am."

Ian pushed her back in a rush of movement. Sinai gasped. Her back touched the wall, but not as hard as she would have expected. Somehow, she knew Ian had protected her from being hurt. It was in his nature.

"I'm alpha, Sinai. You can't challenge me and expect me not to respond." Ian growled low.

Sinai could see his struggle with his animal. She felt it on her skin. Her heart raced and body yearned for him. It receded as quickly as it rose. She studied Ian and saw the control on his face.

"My other form wants to mate, and I'm trying everything to control it. Be still, Nai," Ian warned.

Sinai went with her instinct. She pushed him a little away, then jumped up, using her power to levitate. She clamped her legs around his hips. Ian shuddered as her clothed mound touched his hard, jean-covered erection.

"I don't want you to control it. Take me, Ian," Sinai demanded.

Chapter Three

Ian was still. "Be very sure of this, Sinai. There will be no going back."

Sinai didn't even have to think about it. "I'm sure."

The words had barely left her lips when Ian's covered hers. The kiss was claiming. His silken tongue slid along hers and duelled with it. Sinai returned his fervour with equal hunger. He made a purring sound which vibrated in her mouth. Sinai clenched his shoulders. He withdrew and ripped the neckline of her sundress, baring her. Sinai gasped as the air touched her fevered skin. Ian ripped off his own shirt, then pressed his chest against her breasts. She moaned at the touch of skin against skin. He shifted, abrading her nipples with his chest. His fingers burrowed into her hair, loosening it from its bindings. He groaned. With impatient movements, he unbuckled his belt and unzipped his jeans. His cock came into view – thick, long and red with need. He ripped open the condom she hadn't even seen him get. He rolled it onto his shaft then braced his hands on either side of her head. Sinai gripped his forearms.

She threw her head back as the blunt head of his cock rubbed against her aching slit. With a harsh grunt, he filled her. A scream bubbled in her throat. Sinai clamped her legs around him. Ian growled and pumped fast. His cock glided against her pussy walls. The power of his thrusts caused her back to scrape along the wall he was taking her against. It didn't matter. Sinai tightened her grip on his flexing forearms. In and out he thrust, each pump of his cock going deeper and deeper inside her.

"Ian."

Undulating her hips, Sinai pushed forward, then back, countering his momentum. His heated body pressed her harder against the wall. Ian's harsh breath feathered against the side of her neck. He inhaled and made a pleased rumbling sound. Moaning, Sinai held tighter to his arms. Ian pinned her with his body blanketing hers. The sensation of being covered, unable to escape, heightened her desire.

Ian's thrusts increased, his cock creating a delicious friction as he stroked in her hungry pussy. He licked along the juncture where her neck met her shoulder. The sensuous glide of his tongue caressed her skin and Sinai moaned at the slight pain as he bit.

Ian growled, then nibbled up the side of her neck, along her jaw, then her chin. His harsh breath moved in time with each thrust. The silken heat of his cock moving in and out of her wetness brought tears of pleasure to her eyes.

"More!" Sinai wailed.

Ian growled again, a loud rumbling deep in his chest. He nipped her chin. With a harsh sound in the back of his throat, he licked along her lips. Sinai ran her tongue along the same path as his. Ian moaned. With deliberate intent, he intertwined his tongue with hers while he thrust with urgency. Sinai locked her legs around his hips tighter. Ian suckled her tongue into his mouth, kissing her wantonly.

The taste of him filled her mouth, while his scent of nature and man tantalised her. Ian thrust hard, rotating his hips in a movement that made her breath catch. Her heart raced while the tightness filled the base of her stomach, and her pussy flooded. He repeated the motion, and it sent her over the edge into the abyss.

"Ian!" Sinai screamed, caught in the savage clutches of her release.

"Sinai."

Sinai pressed down. Her pussy clenched around his hard shaft. The violent look in his gaze only thrilled her. He slid his hands down and laced his fingers with hers.

"Mate," Ian growled, a deep bassy sound.

Sinai leaned in and said against his lips, *"Mate."*

The words set off a vicious clench in his lower gut. The hairs on the back of his neck stood up. His beast roared at the scent of what was his.

"Bed," he demanded.

Sinai blinked slowly, then she seemed to understand. A brief shift, then he felt the softness of the bed. He took their laced fingered and pinned Sinai's hands to the bed. He pumped forward. Her pussy clenched around his cock in a sensual grip he wasn't ever going to let get away from him. His being roared again. Sinai shifted, moving with him. Her honey face was coated in sweat. He held her hands more firmly as he thrust into her wet heat. Sinai moaned, a sweet, lush sound that made his cock harden even more.

He watched every expression on her face as he sank into her wet flesh. He licked her lips, stroking deep. She whimpered and countered his movement.

"Mine. Mine. Mine," he chanted, thrusting after each word.

Sinai moaned, then grunted as he thrust harder. She growled, shifting her head back. At the view of her graceful neck, Ian leaned in and licked along the centre of it. He kissed it, then bit down.

"Yes... I need...please...Ian." Sinai shivered.

He continued holding her down with his hands and the grip he had with his teeth on her neck as he moved with his demanding strokes. The sound of flesh hitting flesh filled his ears. Sinai clenched around his cock. His sac tightened painfully. Ian groaned as she moaned. Still thrusting into her, Ian watched as her eyes went opaque. Clenching his hands, he thrust deeper. Sinai whimpered, a broken sound. He released her neck and leaned in and kissed her, swallowing the sounds she was making. He jerked at the feel of a sharp nip. He tasted blood in his mouth and shared it with her. Playing with her tongue, he pumped into her. Sinai growled and countered his movements.

Her fire and the passion he had always admired was in her touch, the way her body moved with his. All of it combined created an aphrodisiac that made him only want her even more. Now he was having her, he wanted it all, everything she could give and beyond. Ecstasy made her face ethereal and beautiful. The sounds she made drove him crazy. They set off a rumbling of his other. He licked along her jaw and stroked urgently inside her. Sinai contracted around him, and a gush of her cream coated his sheathed shaft as she came.

"Ian!"

She rolled her hips. The combination of her undulating pussy and her wanton sounds sent him over the edge.

"Sinai!"

Caging her beneath him, he stroked into her greedy cunt as his release held him. His cock pulsed out his seed. Sinai purred and moved her hips in that same way. Contentment filled Ian. He released his hold on her hands, then leaned against her, blanketing her body. Sinai wrapped her arms around his shoulders, fingers curling around his hair. She stroked her finger along the top of his left ear. Ian purred. Sinai stopped, then did it again. He made the same sound. Sinai chuckled and stroked his ear. Ian hardened again and started to thrust. Sinai gasped and moved with him.

* * * *

The sounds of the others working around him faded as Ian spread the pecans, strawberries and chocolate on the dough, then made the intricate shape that made Ianis B Special. He set it on the tray, then made another. As he went about the familiar routine of making the pastry, Ian's thoughts filled with Sinai. They were having a good time. She had sort of accepted he was moving in, at least for a few months.

Ian frowned as he wondered how he would leave once her birthday passed. He was already used to having her around. He wasn't about to ask her to let him stay on. He pushed the thoughts of that out of his mind. Ian rolled his neck, not even breaking his movements as he made the next pastry. The feeling of being out of sorts filled him. It all went back to the routine he had started to become used to.

For the last two weeks, Sinai would come in with him when he opened Sinfully McIntyre. She would have her tea and also make him a cup while he got the first set of the Ianis B Special ready. Sinai would get the first one of the day, hot out of the oven. He would take a break and join her as she ate the pastry. The sounds she made would put him on edge. They would share a few heated kisses. The taste of the pastry was sweeter from her mouth. She was usually gone to start her day before anyone else arrived. It also gave him a chance to calm down. That morning, however, she had been called away on a case, leaving him alone in bed, to come alone to open the bakery.

You're used to opening things yourself. Don't get used to her being around.

A sense of rightness filled him. He raised his head and watched as Sinai walked towards him. She teased Sin and Savage, flirting with them lightly. Ian made a sound of exasperation. He didn't know what it was about the twins that made women lose their senses. Sinai gave Pandora a nasty look. Pandora flipped her the bird. Sinai took a step to her. Savage interceded, moving Sinai away from Pandora. Sin moved subtly, placing himself next to Pandora. Ian would like them to get along, but held out little hope it was going to happen. Savage brought Sinai over to him. She was laughing and stroking the end of Savage's ice blond braid. Ian growled softly. Savage glanced sideways at him, a playful look on his face and a twinkle in his light green eyes.

Ian glared and grabbed Sinai's hand from Savage's. He pulled her away, down the hall to his office. The sound of laughter came from behind them. Sinai shuddered. Ian reached the door to his office and opened it. He glanced at Sinai and noticed she was doing a finger wave to Savage and Sin. The two of them stood in the entrance leading down the hall. They waved

at her, blowing her a kiss. Ian growled louder and pushed her into the office. He glanced out the door and pointed at them in a warning. Savage and Sin chuckled, walking out of view.

Ian went inside, closing the door behind him. He leant back against the door, crossing his arms over his chest. Sinai was rested against his desk, her legs crossed. Sinai was the chief of the Blackstone Haven Police Department because she was elected, not due to her family being the founders of the town. Since BHPD didn't wear uniforms, Sinai was dressed as she usually was, except the colours varied. Her dark grey blazer covered a pale grey button down shirt. From watching her dress, Ian knew she wore her gun in a specially designed shoulder holster under the jacket. She also had a few knives and other things tucked into different compartments. The BHPD all had such holsters with specially made areas to carry things they needed in order to deal with the various beings in Blackstone Haven. Sinai crossed her legs. Her jeans fit her long legs perfectly.

Ian walked towards her. She opened her legs, and he lifted her onto the edge of the desk, fitting himself between her spread thighs. He leaned in to kiss her. Sinai caught his jaw in her hand, holding him away.

"What's up with this possessive bull?" she asked mildly.

Ian sighed. He should have known she would call him on it. Sinai squeezed his jaw.

"I don't like it when you get all..." He trailed off.

"All what?"

Ian debated what to say to not piss her off. He at least hoped for a kiss. "Not like yourself. All fawny and shit."

Sinai caught the soap that appeared with her other hand and put it on the desk next to her.

"Fawny?" She snorted.

"Okay. All female."

"I am a female."

"I know that. Real well." He rubbed against her.

Sinai whimpered, then cleared her throat. "Uh-uh. No changing the subject. Why does Savage and Sin being friendly bother you?"

"They're flirting, damn it." Ian caught the soap and put it on the desk next to the other. He frowned at it. "I think I need to tell your mom to give me a box, because you drive me to swear."

"Yeah, I'm the reason for your potty mouth." Sinai's tone was dry.

Ian sighed. Sinai laughed in his face and squeezed his jaw again.

"You know good and well Savage and Sin aren't flirting. They're doing it to piss you off."

Ian grumbled. "I know they are. But why are you playing into it?"

"Back to that female thing. An attractive man—" She paused, then made a rough sound before continuing. "Well, actually, two devastatingly gorgeous men being so—well, any woman would be nuts not to enjoy it." She smiled devilishly. "Add to that you getting all bent out of shape, and it's downright entertaining."

"I'm not entertained. I don't know what it is about them, anyway," Ian griped.

"I'm amused, and in this case, I'm the only one that counts. As for what it is about them..." Sinai made a humming noise, then grinned wickedly. "It's a female thing."

Ian rolled his eyes. He'd heard that a lot when it came to Sin and Savage. Sinai laughed, and she ran her finger under his jaw, then up the side of his cheek. Ian shivered. She stroked the lower lobe of his ear, then along the top of it. Ian grunted, and he frantically undressed her. He pushed off her jacket and hit the release for the holster. He slid it into the chair behind the desk, then grabbed her shirt and pulled. The buttons popped off. He leaned in and licked along the top of her breasts in the cream-coloured bra. He worked on her buckle, getting it open and bringing down the zipper. Sinai rose up, and he pulled down her jeans. She pushed off her loafers, revealing the socks that matched her ripped shirt. He took off her jeans and threw them.

Ian gripped the side of her panties and tugged. Sinai gasped, then she glared.

"If you keep ripping my clothes, you're going to have to take me shopping to buy new ones," she warned.

"I'll take you." Ian would have agreed to anything. He had to have her now.

"I'm going to remind you that you said that," Sinai promised.

Ian kissed her to shut her up. Sinai's fingers touched his skin as she unbuttoned his shirt. Ian grunted. He knew she could have removed his clothing with her power, and she did it this way to torture him. He moaned as her hands brushed the top of his stomach where it met his jeans. She made quick work of getting him out of his jeans, and pulled his cock out of his boxers. Her hot hand slid up and down his sensitised shaft.

Impatiently, Ian pulled out of her grip and grabbed her ass. He leaned her back and stroked into her. Sinai moaned loudly. Ian swallowed the sound as he pumped into her heated wetness. In moments, he was on the edge. Sinai's wetness soaked him. Her wet canal felt glorious against his naked flesh. Ian was so grateful they had decided to forgo condoms. He couldn't give her anything, and she couldn't affect him. Sinai was on the pill, so she wouldn't get pregnant unless they wanted her to. At the thought, Ian growled. His animal wanted to give her its child. Ian struggled against that need. He gained control.

Ian stroked more urgently. Sinai moaned again, locking her legs on his back. Ian raised his head. Sinai's hair was loose under her as she lay across his desk. The pale grey shirt was open, and her chest heaved in the cream bra. Ian braced his hands on either side of the desk. It skidded across the floor. Sinai grunted and put her hand, palm down, on the surface. The slight feel of power tickled along his skin. The desk didn't move again. Ian used her stabilising the desk to push harder and harder into her. Sinai took each thrust. Her fingers bit into his ass. Ian raised his head back and roared as he came. Sinai groaned loudly and held him, her fingers digging into his ass.

Ian shuddered, then collapsed against her. He drew air in and out harshly, trying to catch his breath. Sinai made a sound, then she pushed at him. Ian rolled off her. He stiffened as he started to fall off the desk. Before he could catch himself, he felt the power along his skin. Ian glanced blearily and saw he was floating. In moments, the plush softness of the couch touched his back. Ian glanced at Sinai and saw her naked back disappearing into the door leading to the bathroom.

"I need a shirt. I'll have to forgo underwear," she said.

The shower started. Ian smiled, putting his hand under his head, watching the open doorway. After a bit, when the water stopped, Sinai came back in, towelling off.

"Shirt?" she asked.

"Pick what you need." Ian gestured to the extra clothes he kept in a closet in his office.

Sinai walked over, opened it and rummaged through it. Ian enjoyed the view of her ass moving as she looked.

"Stop watching my butt," Sinai said.

She wiggled it. Ian stood and approached her. Sinai turned and held up her hand.

"Uh-uh. I've got to get back to work. And you need to take a shower, unless you plan to go out there smelling like me. You are so going to get shit if you do," Sinai said.

She caught the soap and threw it on the desk across the room. It skittered along the top, stopping just on the edge.

"I'm gonna get it anyway. You were sort of loud," Ian teased.

Sinai snorted. "You weren't exactly silent. All that grunting and growling. And that roar at the end. You would think a tiger was in here or something." Sinai gave him an impish grin.

She went back into the bathroom. He walked over to the door. The spacious bathroom seemed more alive with her in it. Sinai bustled around, dressing. As each piece of clothing went on her body, Ian resisted the urge to strip her and take her again.

"Nope. Not happening. Work now. Play later," Sinai said.

She brushed out her hair and braided it in quick, efficient movements. Sinai came to him. She crowded him in the doorway. Ian put his hand behind his head, gripping the doorframe, and smiled. Sinai laughed and kissed him gently. Ian locked his knees at the unexpectedness of the tenderness. Sinai withdrew and put her hands, overlapping each other, on his chest. She looked him in the eyes.

"Wesley still hasn't come around, huh?" Sinai asked,

"It's taking him longer than usual. He'll come around, or not." Ian shrugged.

Wesley hadn't come by the bakery in over two weeks, ever since that day in Conundrum when they told him what they were. The others still came and helped out. But not Wesley. The others told him Wesley hadn't talked to them either at Conundrum. Lately, he was locked up in his office lab. Ian hadn't even spoken to him. It bothered him. They usually talked at least once a day. Even when Wesley hadn't been in Blackstone, Ian would at least get an email from him daily. Now he was here, they usually talked more often.

"It's bothering you," Sinai pointed out.

Ian shrugged again, saying nothing.

"Men. Always making things complicated." Sinai sighed.

Ian glared. "He needs time. And he's not talking to any of us, including Pandora."

"I always thought he was a smart man. Not talking to Pandora" —Sinai's lips curled at the name— "is a good thing. Not talking to you, on the other hand, is a bone-headed move."

"Wesley will figure it out in his time," Ian said softly.

Sinai watched him for a moment more, then leaned up and kissed him. Ian kissed her, wrapping his arms around her. He gripped her ass and lifted her. Sinai laughed, then disintegrated from his arms. Ian turned and glared. Sinai came back to form close to the door.

"So not fair."

"Hey. Can't let you tempt me into shirking my duties again," Sinai said.

"Knowing you, you came off the clock to come see me. Give me a sec, and I'll make you a tea to go and pack you an Ianis B to go," Ian offered.

He went to the shower and got in.

"Okay." Sinai's voice sounded closer.

Ian glanced through the frosted glass and could make out she was leaning against the doorjamb. He lathered up quickly, then washed off. Getting out, he took the towel she offered. Sinai stepped back to the door. Ian stifled a smile. She knew him well. He was about to grab her. Instead, he towelled off. He noticed there was clothing on the counter top for him.

"Thanks," Ian said.

Sinai made a "don't mention it" motion with her hand. He dressed. Sinai watching him made his cock harden. He had a heck of a time fitting his erection in his pants. Sinai walked over to him and smoothed down his untucked shirt. Her fingers brushed his erection. He leaned in and kissed her. Withdrawing, he slapped her butt. Sinai yelped, then rubbed it.

"Come on. You need to get back to protecting and serving. And I need to face the ribbing your being so loud caused."

"You're lucky I stifled the sound. Next time, you're on your own. We'll see who is loud." Sinai snorted.

"So, I can entice you again to get wild and wicked in my office?" Ian put his hand around her waist.

Sinai leaned in, almost touching his lips. "If you promise to be loud for me."

"I'll be as loud as you want me," he promised, kissing her briefly.

He led her to the door, his palm on the small of her back. Opening it, he led her down the hall. He walked to get her the tea and Ianis B Special.

"Here. With y'all's meeting going so long, I figured she'd want it to go." Savage sounded amused as he handed him a fairly large boxed pastry and carry-out mug.

Ian glanced at the other two. Sin's shoulders were shaking as he mixed batter. Pandora had a disgusted look on her face. Ian looked back at Savage.

"How do you know how to make her tea?" Ian asked.

He didn't ask what pastry it was, since they all knew which she ate.

Savage rolled his eyes. "Since you changed the way you drink it to that honey crap and cinnamon, I figured she took it that way. You're such a sap."

Sin snickered, stopped stirring, and bowed his head, shoulders shaking.

"She put some juju on him," Pandora said loudly.

Sinai growled. Ian intercepted her and led her towards the door.

"Thanks, Savage," Sinai called.

"You're welcome, Nai. And I found someone who will come meet with you."

Ian glanced at him. Savage nodded. Ian knew what he was referring to. He walked Sinai out to her car.

"What is Savage talking about?"

"He found a death demon for you to talk to."

Sinai stopped and gaped. "Savage knows death demons. How?"

"He'll have to let you know if he chooses to."

Sinai frowned, then looked at the closed back door of the bakery. "I thought they were all human until you mentioned what happened with Wesley. But I can't figure out what they are. If it was something wonky, one of the elders would know. But nothing. What are Savage and Sin? Hell, what is that she-devil?"

Ian chuckled at her calling Pan a she-devil, then answered her. "You'll have to ask them. Or Pandora."

"I'll ask Sin and Savage. As for the she-demon, I'd rather gouge out her eyeballs."

Ian stifled a chuckle. If only Sinai knew how close she was to what Pan was. Sinai continued walking across the spacious parking area to her car. He put his hand on the base of her spine. When they got to the car, she opened the door and got in. He leaned over, handing her the box and to-go cup with Sinfully McIntyre's logo and name on it.

"I'm getting quite a collection of these," Sinai said, shaking her mug.

She put the mug in the cup holder then patted the box.

"I'm glad Savage included extras for my team, or else I would have to shoot them to keep them away from mine."

"Are you even going to share it?"

"I'll have to think about it." Sinai touched the box.

Ian laughed, putting his arms on the roof as he leaned in and kissed her. Sinai kissed him, then pushed him away.

"Get back to work. Tell Savage I said thanks for getting someone to come to Blackstone to talk with me. I'll tell the family what I find out."

Ian frowned, realising he hadn't told her everything. "Um. About that. He didn't have to go out of town. From what he and Sin said, there are death demons who live in Blackstone Haven."

"What? Who? No way. We would know if there was." Sinai leant back against her seat.

Ian shook his head. "They said they are secretive, and that something is off about this whole death-demon-your-legacy thing. That's why I asked them to look for one. I had no clue there were death demons here."

"I'll have to tell the elders about this. Oh God. There is no way this should be possible." Sinai frowned, then her expression cleared. "We'll have to deal with it once I talk to this death demon. Who is it?"

"He won't tell me. Neither of them will. They said it was up to the death demon to reveal himself. The reaction to them is usually unfavourable," Ian pointed out.

"It wouldn't be like that in Blackstone Haven. Acceptance of all beings is what Blackstone was founded on." Sinai scowled.

"Would you have really been so accepting, with what all death demons have done to your family?" Ian asked.

"We would." Sinai paused, then amended. "Some Blackstones would have tried to kill them, but from our experience with them, we know they are hard to kill. After that, we would have listened and given them a chance. But this subterfuge – the elders may not be so forgiving."

Ian frowned. The elder council of Blackstone was in place to decide if they would grant a haven to various beings. Some beings were dangerous, and they had to be cautious. Some beings, when granted sanctuary, did commit crimes. That was why Sinai and her team were needed. They also dealt with other types of regular crimes that would happen in any town.

"Let me go. See you later," Sinai said.

Ian kissed her once more and stepped back, closing the door. He waited for her to pull out. She tooted her horn. He waved and went back to work.

Sinai drove away from Ian, her mind filled with everything he'd revealed. If what he'd said was true, and there were death demons in Blackstone Haven, and none of them knew it, then that was an issue—one the elders would have to address. Her mom and a few others of their family were on the council, along with members from various races. There were some demons on the council, but no death demons. Sinai's frown deepened. Sin, Savage and Pandora were another issue. They would have to find out what they were and decide if they would be able to stay.

Sinai smiled as she fantasised about evicting Pandora from Blackstone. It would be her pleasure to do that. She'd make it painful. Sinai whistled as she drove into the parking area for the BHPD. She got out of the car and went inside. Her team drifted in as she entered. Quickly, she put down the pastry box, grabbed her Ianis B Special, and retreated to her office. Taking a seat at her desk, she looked out of her open office door as her team got their pastries and went to their desks.

Sinai turned her attention to her computer and started it up. As she waited for it to load, she took a sip of her tea. It was perfect. Once in the computer, she opened her email. A smile curved her lips as she saw the email from Ash, Ian's sister. Ashley McIntyre was one of the best of her team. Ash would be gone for another eight months or so for the special training she went to in D.C. Opening the email, Sinai chuckled as she read the message. Ashley's threat of coming home to check on her and Ian to make sure they were really together didn't faze her. She knew Ash wouldn't leave her training in the middle of it. Sinai closed her email, looked at the reports on her desk, and got to work.

Hours later, Sinai entered her house. She pulled her gun out swiftly as the feeling of something off registered.

"No need for that, Sinai," a familiar voice stated.

Sinai didn't lower her weapon as she walked down the hall and into her living room. The person sitting there didn't shift from the chair on which she sat.

"What are you doing in my house, Taye?" Sinai asked.

"You needed to speak with a death demon. I'm here on their behalf," Taye McKellen said calmly.

Chapter Four

Sinai was shocked as she looked at the woman who worked for her. If she had to guess who the death demons were, she would never have picked Taye. Taye stood with an effortless grace. Sinai frowned. She didn't ever remember seeing Taye move like that. Taye had come to Blackstone almost twenty years ago, and claimed she was a lesser fae. Taye's silver hair was caught in an azure-coloured rib-accent clip, high away from her face, trailing behind her in a ponytail. Her dark caramel complexion made her silver eyes glow. As Taye moved, there was an arrogance that wasn't there normally.

"Who are you?"

"Taye McKellen. You know that already." Taye's tone was that same teasing one.

Sinai gave her an exasperated look and put away her gun.

"You have a lot of explaining to do, Taye. And don't avoid the question. Who are you in the death demon world?"

"The leader of the death demons here in Blackstone Haven." Taye shrugged.

Sinai was surprised. As far as they knew, in the death demon world, it was men who ruled.

"Yes, they usually do, but they know violence. And I like violence, and it is that and my blood that lets me rule. At least here. There's a lot of shit going on, Sinai," Taye warned.

"Come on. I need some water," Sinai said.

She turned and walked to the kitchen. Taye followed behind her. After getting the water and giving Taye one, Sinai took a seat and gestured for her to sit also. Taye sat across from her.

"You really shouldn't leave your back unprotected when you're around any demon," Taye said, taking a sip of the water.

Sinai drank before responding. "My back isn't uncovered."

A surge of power filled the room. Sinai didn't look away from Taye. From the surge, she knew where each of her cousins and siblings stood. Peyton and Sabra were at her back facing Taye. Khalida, her cousin, was to the right behind Taye. Jalil, her brother, was on the left behind Taye. Rueben, her other brother, was on her side to the right. Ulkios, her cousin, was on her left side.

"With all this power, none of you could kill me." Taye chuckled.

"No, but I can." Ryssa's voice sounded as she shimmered into view.

Taye stiffened, then turned her head to Ryssa. Sinai saw the fury in Ryssa's gaze. Ryssa's arm was steady as she held the crossbow almost pressing against Taye's cheek.

"Ah, Ry. I didn't know you were back. I missed you, my friend," Taye said softly.

Ryssa growled. "Friends share things. They don't keep such a huge secret."

"I'm not the only one with secrets," Taye replied.

"I want to kill you, Taye. I really do," Ryssa warned.

Taye sighed. "You couldn't, even if you wanted to."

Ryssa's voice was cold. "I picked up a little something in my travels."

Taye glanced at the bow, and her eyes widened, then narrowed. Sinai studied the arrow notched in the bow. It looked like any other, except the tip was blindingly white and seemed to have writings on it.

"Go ahead, then," Taye said.

Ryssa's arm was steady as she pushed it against Taye's face. Taye didn't look away from her.

"You have some fucking explaining to do, bitch," Ryssa growled.

Taye laughed and caught the soap as it appeared in the air. She held it out to Ryssa. Ryssa took it, pulling the bow away from her face.

"Ry, you always have a flare for the dramatic," Sabra said dryly.

"Oh no, Sabra. She was serious. She could kill me with the life arrow," Taye said, then made a kissing sound. "But she loves me too much."

Ryssa snorted and took a seat next to Taye. Taye pushed against her shoulder, and Ryssa pushed back. Ryssa got serious.

"Explain to us how you are a death demon in Blackstone, and none of us knew," Ryssa said.

"We figured it was best to keep a low profile. Until Savage came to me and mentioned you all were having a problem with a death demon, I didn't know about it. Ryssa, you should have told me," Taye said.

"I didn't think it pertained to our friendship. Heck, if I knew you were a demon, I might have," Ryssa replied.

Taye nodded, then said, "Explain this to me."

"Didn't Savage fill you in?" Sinai asked.

"No. He said it was your story to tell, and how much you wanted to tell me was up to you."

Sinai looked at her siblings, then she explained about the legend, the family they had lost, and what was in the basic prophecy. Taye listened and frowned.

"And you're sure it's a death demon?"

"Yes."

Taye shook her head. "It can't be. We don't work that way. At least not willingly. And I haven't heard about it."

"Maybe you aren't in the know," Jalil said cuttingly.

Taye stiffened and said without facing him, "I can make you bow to me, Jalil. It is my right."

"I bow to no one," Jalil snarled.

Sinai looked at her normally affable brother. He glanced at her, then walked to look out the window. She turned, noting Taye looked at Jalil. Taye returned her attention to Sinai.

"Although Jalil could have said it more diplomatically, he has a point. How would you know about a death demon stalking us?"

"Being the queen has its perks." Taye leant back and struck an arrogant pose.

"You're the death demon queen?" Sinai blinked and sat forward.

"Yes. So I would be in the know," Taye replied, glancing over at Jalil.

Jalil glared at her briefly, then went back to facing the window. Taye smirked. Ryssa slapped Taye on the shoulder.

"Only you. You can't possibly need haven. So what are you doing in Blackstone?" Ryssa asked.

Taye leant forwards, sombre. "Sabra will make her twenty-eight next May, and until then, or she finds her mate, we thought it best to be here in Blackstone Haven. The rift is open between worlds here until then. "

Sinai looked at Sabra. Sabra frowned. Sinai knew Sabra didn't like being reminded of what she had to do once she made twenty-eight. Besides facing the legacy, she also had to fulfil her place in Blackstone Haven.

"You all came here in hiding to protect the rift?" Sinai asked.

"And Sabra, until it's time," Taye said.

"I don't need protecting," Sabra said.

"In our eyes, you do," Taye replied.

"The h—"

"Sabra, leave it for now." Ryssa cut her off.

Sabra subsided. The big sister tone made them all stop and listen.

"I know you won't get into the reasons why about Sabra until you're ready, but you need to go before the elders. They need to know how many of you are here," Ryssa said firmly.

Taye opened her mouth.

"You know it has to be this way, especially if you are queen. There are protocols," Ryssa said.

Taye nodded. "Fine. But back to this death demon thing. You told me all about it, but what is his name?"

"We don't know. None of us do, until he's claiming the one he picks," Sinai said.

"Even if you don't know his real name, names are power. You should at least have the name it's known by. Something is off here. I don't know what, but it is." Taye scowled.

Sinai frowned. "So you can't tell us anything?"

"Just be careful. Something else is in the works with this legend. It's not what it seems. And Ryssa has something that can kill it, if it is a death demon," Taye pointed out.

"But we're not allowed to take weapons with us," Sinai said.

"You don't need to take it. You can make it," Taye said.

"It can be made?" Ryssa asked.

"It can. I'll show you how," Taye said.

"You'd show us how to kill you?" Jalil asked in disbelief.

"It's about trust. Something you should learn about. I know you won't kill me," Taye said.

"Can't kill you." Ryssa snorted and removed her hand from on Taye's "There are levels to the life arrows. And it would take a whole boat load of them to take you out."

Taye smiled. "Reading me is so rude, Ryssa."

"You let me," Ryssa said.

"True. I wanted to show you I was being real." Taye made a motion of her hands. "Now, let's go and see the council, and I will start showing you all how to make life arrows."

"Good. We'll have time to prepare. We won't need them until next year. The death demon only strikes once a year," Sinai said.

"Stranger and stranger. This makes no sense. I'll do some checking." Taye shook her head.

Sinai said, "Good. And we'll all practice with the arrows so we'll be ready next time."

"Ah...here comes your delicious man. He is so scrumptious." Taye smiled.

Sinai's eyes narrowed and she growled. "Don't make me cut you."

Taye laughed and held up her hands. "Okay. Okay. I can look, can't I?"

"No. Get out of my house. All of you," Sinai said.

Taye laughed, and Sinai's siblings joined her. They all started disappearing, one by one.

Ryssa was last and looked at her. "You must learn to make the arrows well."

"You should be worrying about yourself. January is next year so you're in more danger than I am."

Ryssa frowned, saying nothing else. She faded and was gone. Sinai stood and walked out of the kitchen into the hall. She arrived just as Ian came in. He closed the door and looked at her. There was a smile on his face. He walked over to her and kissed her. Sinai leaned in to him. Ian drew back a bit and smiled.

"Trust me."

Sinai frowned. She heard a sound. Glancing down, she saw his nails shift into razor sharp talons. Ian stepped back and slashed out at her. Sinai stood still, although every instinct said fight. She prayed as his claws descended to her chest. She hissed, but then realised he hadn't cut her. Sinai gasped. Ian stepped back and shook his hand. Something started to zip along his talons and up his hand. In a blink, it enveloped him, coating him in a black cloud.

Sinai's heart pounded, and she hissed, "It's not your time yet. Get from here."

The shape stalled, then seemed to look at her. Two glowing red eyes looked at her, then the shape flowed from Ian and along the floor. Ian moved to her and gripped her hand.

"What is it doing?"

"I think it's dancing."

Sinai blinked, unsure if she was seeing right. The vapour-like fog moved and shifted, then came together in the shape of a man. No features could be seen. The wisps of black turned and flicked into what seemed to be a coat. It did a little dance, then whooshed to

them. Sinai ducked and Ian with her. A mocking laugh came, then the word "Soon" hovered over their heads. Then the shadow flowed to the door and under it.

"Really dancing?" Ian asked.

"More like gloating," Sinai said.

"I thought you said it came once a year," Ian said.

Sinai headed to the living room and walked to the window. The shadow raced along her flowers lining the walkway. It moulded into the shape of a man again. It bent and seemed to smell the flowers and dance as it went. The being looked back and made a mocking salute.

"I guess I was wrong."

Ian could taste Sinai's fear. He went over to her. She flinched away. He grabbed her, holding her back against his chest. He put his hands around her waist. Inhaling her scent, he released some calming pheromones.

"I'm not a tiger, so your calming juju won't work on me." Sinai swatted at his hands on her waist, then rested hers over his.

Ian chuckled. He sobered at the display going on outside. The pale black fog that was the shape of a man was putting on a show, walking slowly and, from what he could tell, sniffing flowers as it went. He assumed it was the demon. Ian stiffened and went to pull away to deal with it. Sinai held him.

"Don't waste your energy. He can't be touched until he comes for me."

"Us. Comes for us. I'm in this with you," Ian said.

Sinai looked back at him. "Ian, you —"

"Don't even start with that shit. I'm not going anywhere. And if you try to push me away, I will tell your mom. You know she'll side with me." Ian caught the soap that appeared and put it on the window seat.

"She would. Okay. Together." Sinai sighed.

Ian squeezed her.

"How did you know he was here?" Sinai asked.

Ian didn't know how to put it into words. "There was something strange about you. My beast felt you were off somehow. I couldn't see anything, but instinct made me know I had to do something."

Sinai frowned. "A death demon paid me a visit. Maybe that's why."

"And you let it go?"

"Taye can be trusted. We've known her too long not to. And besides, Ryssa read her."

Ian goggled. "Taye is a death demon? And, wait... When did Ryssa get back?"

Sinai chuckled. "She is. And I was just as shocked. Seems as if they are here for good reasons, although they won't tell us all why yet. And yeah, Ryssa is back, although she doesn't want anyone but family to know."

Ian got tense, then relaxed. He didn't know if Sinai realised what she said. Yes, their families were close, but something like this and the whole of the legend the Blackstones kept between family. The legend he understood knowing, since it now involved him. Telling him about Ryssa being back, on the other hand, let him know she thought of him as family, even though she didn't say it.

"What's wrong?" Sinai asked

Ian smiled and hugged her. "Nothing at all."

Sinai gave a small grin, then looked back out of the window. Ian looked too. The fog was watching them. It waved and went back to smelling flowers. Ian's eyes narrowed. He was not about to lose Sinai to a demon.

* * * *

Ian shifted, watching as Sinai wove power. He could barely feel it with his acute senses. It was deliberate, one of the things she was learning from Taye so they could catch the death demon unaware. Slowly, a shape started to form. The arrow shaft formed, then the glowing white tip. The crossbow came in then, and Sinai raised her hand and took it. She frowned, then sent it away. Sinai leant back on the couch and sighed.

"You need to tell your family the death demon is coming for you," Ian said again, as he had for what felt like a hundred times.

"No," Sinai replied.

Ian grunted and leaned next to her. It was an argument they'd been having for the last three weeks. Sinai was trying to make the life arrows, but refused to tell her family the demon was stalking her. The demon had a warped sense of humour. It showed up at the weirdest of times. And each time it did what he liked to call its gloating dance—flicking the

tail of its shirt and turning in a circle before taking a stroll outside Sinai's house, smelling the flowers. It was aggravating.

"I don't know why you won't tell them."

"Why haven't you confronted Wesley yet?" Sinai countered.

Ian stood and refused to answer. He walked over to the window and sat in the window seat. Sinai came over and leaned against his shoulder.

"You all are being stubborn," Sinai said.

"Like you are," Ian countered.

"In your case, it isn't life or death," Sinai said.

Ian clenched his fist at the flippant way she said it. He unclenched each finger and gripped her hand on his shoulder.

"Life. It will be life," Ian insisted.

"We'll fight for it," Sinai promised.

"We will."

"Now go talk to Wesley," Sinai said.

"No."

"Stubborn." Sinai smacked him on the shoulder.

Ian growled and pulled her into his lap. He kissed her. A hissing sound made him look to the side.

"Hush, you, before I make you into a pair of shoes," Sinai warned.

Ian laughed and reached out and petted Einstein, his Ashera cat.

"Your cat hates me."

"She doesn't hate you. She just needs to get to know you," Ian said.

Sinai looked at him in disbelief. "She ripped up my throw pillow and shredded some of my blazers, and you say she doesn't hate me. Why would you call a female cat Einstein, anyway?"

"It's her way of seeing if you are worthy of her liking you. And she's smart. That's why she's Einstein. Besides, I won the game to get that name." Ian chuckled, scratching behind Einstein's ear.

Sinai glared at him, then at the cat. "If she doesn't get over this liking thing soon, we'll have to go shopping again."

"Oh, Christ. Anything but that," Ian pleaded.

"You're the one who promised to take me." Sinai laughed.

"Nothing a man says when he is having sex should be held against him," Ian said.

"A man should not promise something he can't do."

Ian looked at Einstein. "Daddy doesn't want to go shopping again, so stop ripping up Sinai's clothes."

Einstein hissed, then took off.

"Yeah. She likes me, all right," Sinai said.

Ian bit his lip to stifle the laughter. Sinai rolled her eyes. Ian kissed her. Sinai shifted, straddling him. A sizzle of power coated his skin, then he moaned as she rubbed her bare mound on his naked cock. He loved when Sinai was impatient and used her power to strip them down. Sinai's hand gripped his erection, and she rubbed it against her wet slit. She flexed up then sank down on his cock. Ian moaned as she sucked him in. She went up and down on him, her nails digging into his shoulder. Ian lay back on the cushion, letting her have him.

She was demanding and hungry as she kissed him. Her pussy clenched around his cock. Ian moaned as she undulated around him. He pumped up. Sinai put her hand in the middle of his chest, holding him down.

"Mate," Sinai rasped.

Ian's back bowed as his ethereal beast came out, enveloping them. His spiritual white tiger roared and melded with her spirit. Through a vision gone white with slashes of black, Ian roared. In his thoughts, he knew it shouldn't have been possible yet. They weren't through all the stages of mating. He hadn't warned her. Sinai screamed and bowed back. He saw her amber mythical beast join his. They frolicked together, joining and parting slowly. His tiger purred, then turned her amber beast and mounted her.

Ian shuddered as his tiger took her soul. Sinai moaned wildly, her breath stalled and heart sputtered. Ian tried to release her, knowing she could not take it yet.

No. Give it to me, Sinai demanded in his mind.

He felt her will stiffen and her heart stabilise, and she rocked on his cock. Ian let his phantom tiger go, and it roared as it took her amber soul. They melded, no division between them. Ian opened his mouth and roared. He shivered, gripping the side of the window seat. He felt it give under his fingers. Ian let his being have its way.

* * * *

Sinai lowered her head. Amber filled her gaze, casting Ian in a glow. A white and black tiger glow came at her as she rode Ian's cock. A shaft of power came from her, forming an amber tiger, met it. They rolled and played. Sinai laughed, then gasped as the phantom white tiger turned her amber one and mounted it. She felt it pierce her soul. Her heartbeat slowed. The feel of Ian starting to pull back brought her around.

No. Give it to me, she demanded telepathically.

Ian let it go, and the beast roared and took her amber spirit. Sinai moaned as they melded. She felt Ian's soul slip into hers. It filled her up and up. Sinai gave him some of her power. Ian bucked, almost unseating her. She pressed down, rotating her hips. Ian roared, and the sound of wood breaking filled her ears. She did not let up. She fucked him as their two beings melded. Wetness coated them as she moved on his cock. Ian murmured deliriously. The base of her spine got tight and her lower belly tense. She leant back, raising her hands to her sides. The phantom white tiger and the amber one both roared as they came. Sinai shouted as her orgasm took her. Ian quaked as he joined her.

Sinai collapsed against his chest. She listened to Ian's racing heart. His breath was harsh. Sinai snuggled into his side. Ian's fingers stroked her head. She looked up and blinked. The ethereal white tiger curled around the amber one looked at her. It bowed its head to her, then went back to cuddling with the amber. It made a rumbling sound.

"Does that mean I'm a tiger now?" Sinai asked

"Not in reality. Only on the astral plane. Unless you want to use your power to run with my family sometime." Ian replied.

"I'd like that," Sinai said, her voice thick with emotion.

The invitation was the highest his kind could give. Ian kissed the top of her head, then relaxed. His breathing slowed, and she figured he was going to sleep.

"So, about Wesley. When are you going to see him?"

"Leave it." Ian squeezed her.

Sinai frowned, then lay against him and went to sleep. Jerking awake, Sinai glanced around trying to figure out what had awakened her. Noting the empty bed, she got up. Shrugging into her robe she went out of the bedroom door then down the darkened hall and to the stairs to the lower part of the house. Unerringly she turned to the living room. Pausing

in the doorway of the living room Sinai studied Ian as he sat on the window seat looking out at the night. The tension was obvious in his bare back.

Chapter Five

Ian stared out the window at the dark night. Shifting on the window seat he rolled his shoulder. Uneasiness filled his gut. A whisper of a sound reached him and that familiar feeling of his mate being near came to him. The scent of shea butter and coconut enveloped him seconds before she touched his shoulders. She pressed hard, rubbing. Ian moaned softly. A while later Sinai stopped and she leaned against his shoulder, her arms coming around his chest.

"What's wrong?" Her quiet question made him tense. "Don't undo the massage because you're not getting another one."

Ian smiled at her disgruntled tone. Sinai might have become more at ease in touching him but her prickly attitude hadn't changed. He enjoyed their sparring since it usually led to some really vigorous sex. He now got what Wesley had been saying about enjoying the rewards of Sinai complaining to Peyton. He frowned at the thoughts of Wesley. Wesley still hadn't talked to any of them. From the first time they all met they had clicked. Becoming fast friends and like family. Since they met there hadn't been any distance between them.

He replayed Wesley's words of them not being friends like he thought. Yes, he knew Wesley would be pissed and they would work it out. Ian didn't expect him to be hurt. And he knew they had hurt him. Pandora, Sin, Savage and he had discussed ways they could fix it. But they hadn't come up with any way to actually do it. It was one more worry to add to all they had going on. Sinai poked him in the shoulder, bringing his attention back to her question. He chose one of his concerns to share with her.

"*The Klionhs*." He paused. "I read the file about what they used me to do. That is hard enough to live with. All those people dead by my hand." He raised his hand, imagining the blood on it. He knew it wasn't real but at odd moments he could imagine the blood on them. He spoke again. "I don't know what they know. Know about me being a shifter. Or about Pandora, Sin or Savage. The not knowing if I'm, or one of us is, going to end up in some lab somewhere to be examined to see what we are. Or even not knowing what the changes *The Klionhs* have done to me. All of us. This waiting for something to happen because of all that and not having any way to control the outcome is..." He trailed off.

"Fix each problem one at a time. Start with the easiest one to fix."

Ian glanced at her. Sinai had a serious expression. Fixing it was easy to do but how could he? A thought filled his mind and his eyes narrowed.

"You figured it out." It was a statement.

"I've been so focused on it all I didn't think of the obvious. Knowing Pandora, she has been working on at least figuring out what the side effects of *The Klionhs* are. And maybe even figuring out how much the government knows about us," Ian replied.

"Yep, Pandora" – Sinai's lip curled when she said her name – "might be a pain in the ass, but she gets things done. I'm surprised you haven't asked her what she knows."

"We're all dealing with it. I didn't want to add to the others issues too. Wesley –" He paused. "He's taking it especially hard." Ian shrugged.

"And you all are not confronting him about his acting like an idiot. Yeah, you all didn't tell him what you are but that shouldn't affect your friendship like this. You need to knock him over the head and tell him this."

Ian shook his head. "No, he needs space. When he is ready he'll come to us."

"That's you being stubborn."

"Maybe I am but I'm not going to him," Ian insisted.

"And they call me stubborn." Sinai snorted.

Ian pulled her into his lap. "You are but it's cute."

Sinai spluttered then smacked him on the chest. "Cute. Call me that again and I will hurt you."

"Cute." Ian kissed the tip of her nose.

Sinai snapped her teeth at him. Ian laughed and turned her so her back was to his chest. Sinai put her head against his chest and stretched her legs out on the window seat. He leant back and brought his other leg up, cradling her.

Ian stiffened and Sinai tensed as what had become a familiar fog-like shape came to form in front of the window. It floated there, eyes glowing red as it studied them. The features were not distinct. The being clasped its hands and put them under its chin.

'How precious' formed on the glass. The being twirled around, flicking the tails of its shirt and floated backwards away from the window.

'Soon' formed over the other words. Mocking laughter filled the air then slowly faded.

"I'm really getting tired of the gloating dance. A demon with a warped sense of humour," Sinai said.

"He's trying to heighten our fear." Ian hugged her.

"Jerk," Sinai said.

Ian chuckled. They slowly relaxed and watched as the sun came up. Sinai turned and kissed him softly.

"You have some answers to get. And I'm going to prepare for work." She stood and walked out of the room.

* * * *

Ian strode down the hall in Conundrum that led to the offices of the partners. Even though it was so early he knew Pandora, Sin and Savage would already be in and working. They would come in here then come by the bakery to help him out. Wesley was probably in too, since he wasn't coming to Sinfully McIntyre.

He paused in the doorway of the spacious outer office which led to his own office that they had set up for him. Ian hadn't checked it out. He didn't want to give Pandora any ideas he was coming back into the business full-time. In sure strides he entered the outer office, noting it was decorated how he would have done it. Comfortable chairs and couches in the waiting area in dark browns and burnt orange. A few weeks ago Pandora had made it a point to introduce the man she hired to be his assistant. He had told Pandora he wasn't coming back even though she had found an assistant he would have picked for himself. From that meeting, Ian had liked the man.

The desk for his supposed assistant was set in a way which meant no one would get past it unless they were cleared to. Yet it was far enough away from his door it would afford him privacy. He liked that it wasn't right outside his door. All the offices on this floor were set up like his although the colours were done as per each individual taste. Ian grunted. Pandora was slick. Knowing what they would have wanted. He went to the door to the inner office.

Pushing it open, Ian laughed. It was spacious and done in the same colours as the outer office. He walked over and touched the pinball machine. They all loved to play and had a running competition. He noted it was rigged to the others he had seen in the other partners'

offices. That way when they played they could keep track of who was winning. He put his hands on his hips as he stood in front of the wall unit that was next to the machine. It held his favourite board and electronic games. He picked up the electronic Uno game and turned it on. The names of the rest of them popped up. It was also rigged for them to play against each other. He looked back at the other handheld games and figured they all were. He shifted the Uno electronic game to his left hand and touched the paper pack of Uno cards.

I wonder if Sinai plays.

"So, do you like?"

Ian turned to face Pandora. She was leaning against his desk with her jeans-clad legs crossed. She wore a smug grin.

"I'm not coming back full-time," Ian said firmly.

"That's fine. Part-time, then."

"I'm not coming back."

Pandora's smile widened. "Are you trying to convince me or yourself?"

Ian walked over and leaned against the desk next to her.

"I love the bakery. Sinfully McIntyre is my dream."

"I know. And I won't ask you to give that up. But admit it, you miss this." She gestured with her hand. "With the expansion of the bakery and staff you hired you can come back at least part-time. And you have your lab in your house to work in if needed. We can add whatever you need there. It wouldn't take that much. Just agree with me since you know you want to." Pandora patted his hand.

Ian turned his hand and held hers. "You know, it's annoying you know me so well."

"All of you. It's what I do." Pandora laughed.

"We know you too. And let you get away with a lot of stuff." Ian chuckled.

"You were already thinking of coming back anyway. So I didn't do much." Pandora leaned against his shoulder.

"I was." Ian frowned. "But not for a bit. Need to set things up."

"That's fine. You can work from your home lab for now. Then part-time here when ready. It's a win-win. Now, are you ready to see what I have on *The Klionhs*?"

"How did you know I was here for that?"

"It was only a matter of time till you did. I'm glad you finally came to your senses and want to know."

"Sinai helped."

Pandora looked surprised then she pulled a sour expression. "At least she's good for something."

"The two of you would get along if you gave it a chance."

"Like that will happen." Pandora snorted. "Come on, let me show you something first."

She stood and went to a door on the left wall. Pandora opened it and gestured for him to go in. Ian stepped inside. He glanced around at the fully-equipped lab.

"Between each office on this floor one side is a lab and the other is a mini conference room. This lab is for your more personal or sensitive projects. Only those who you want to have access will. Well, those of you and the one you share the lab with. This lab is between you and Wesley so you share this one. On the right wall on the other side of your office is the mini conference room. You and Savage share it."

Ian glanced at the door across the spacious lab that led to Wesley's office. It would be like old times with them sharing lab space. Well, if they were speaking by then.

"Where are you putting the government man?" Ian asked, looking back at her.

"In the office next to mine. We'll be sharing a conference room. I have a lab of my own since the office on the other side is empty. He'll be using the lab with me." Pandora looked sombre.

"What have you found out about what they know?"

"Nothing. There has been no mention of them knowing about us."

Ian wondered if that was a good or bad thing.

"I plan to find out more once Zyric starts working here." Pandora sounded determined.

The tone was one Ian recognised—the one that meant she wouldn't give up until she got what she was after.

"Now let me show you what I've got on *The Klionhs*. It's all in my lab. Sin and Savage already know—they've been helping me. There don't seem to be any harmful effects but there is the increased performance in speed, strength and mentally. In humans it's more noticeable. We're working to strip the controlling-the-person aspect out of it. The government is requesting"—she curled her lips—"that we use it on people who volunteer for a programme to have it used on them. Supposedly it'll be of the person's free will. It'll probably be military or some branches like that. We'll be in control of the usage and the people who use it. Complete control." Pandora smirked. "They think they have us fooled. If

we were just human they would find a way to get us out. But if they don't know what we are we can control the people using it if need be. We'll all have to discuss it and see what we decide to do."

Ian followed her as she talked. He paused in front of Wesley's closed door.

"He's in. Still no interaction with us. I don't know why he's being so stubborn about it."

He heard the underlying frustration and hurt in her voice.

"I don't know. But maybe we'll have to face that we'll be just business partners and no longer friends." Ian rubbed his chest at the pain the thought caused.

He squeezed her hand and led her away.

Sinai opened the door to her house. She put her hands on her hips and made a face at who was waiting for her.

"You traitors finally remember who I am."

The twin wolves made a barking sound and rubbed against her legs. Sinai crossed her arms over her chest.

"Uh huh. I'm not going to fall for it. Where is the new woman you threw me over for?" Sinai said.

The wolves ran back towards their playroom. She followed. They passed it and continued to the door a little away. They sat in front of it. Sinai thought it was strange the door was closed, since she usually left it open. She used the room as a sort of library. She had couches and bookcases set up in an area of the fairly large room. They didn't take up much of the space and she was still working out what to do with the room. Opening the door, Sinai shifted out of the way as McGee and Reid almost knocked her over to get inside. She heard a loud meow that could only be Einstein.

Stepping into the room she closed her eyes slowly, then opened them. She had to be seeing things.

Nope. It's still here.

Sinai walked over and tapped Ian on the shoulder. He turned on the stool he was sitting on.

"What the hell is this?" She caught the soap that appeared and slammed it on the long silver table.

"My lab. Since I'm staying here I needed it." Ian grinned.

Sinai counted then counted again. At the hissing sound from Einstein, she pointed. For once the cat listened and walked away to sit on a blanket that was obviously set up for her. McGee and Reid lay down next to her. She paced then faced him. At his continued grin she moved away and breathed in and out.

"Where are my books?" she asked softly, gesturing to where they usually were.

"Come on," Ian said as he led her to a draped area on the opposite side of the room.

He pulled it down. Sinai stepped forward. Her bookcases were there but they were in the middle of floor-to-ceiling bookcases that seemed to be built into the walls. The various couches in burgundy and chocolate brown plus a few chairs were set up around the area. They matched the themes and colours she had in the rest of her house. The throw pillows and accent colours of pale yellow littered the area. A rug of the colours of the furniture and accents was set in the centre of the area. There was even a mini fridge and cabinet which she assumed had snacks and more beverages. It was what she would have done for herself if she had thought of it. The door that led to the full bath was in her corner of the room.

"This doesn't make up for you taking over my room," Sinai warned as she went over to one of the floor-to-ceiling bookcases.

She noted some of the books weren't any she had read. Others were about science and other things. Sinai shook her head. Ian had mixed her books with his.

"It's only temporary until everything is done. But I might as well be comfortable. I'm going to be working on some things for Conundrum. And if you like you can keep me company by reading here. It's up to you."

She refused to acknowledge the feeling the thought of him leaving invoked. Ian was right. It was temporary. She turned to him. Ian shrugged and put his hands into his back pockets. Sinai walked over to him and leaned against his chest. Ian's arms came around her.

"Pandora convinced you to come back to work."

"Only part-time," Ian admitted.

Sinai stifled a smile. It was entertaining watching him resist going back to Conundrum. Ian loved Sinfully McIntyre but he also loved the company they had all created together. Although she would never admit to Pandora she was glad she had finally convinced him. She glanced back at the area he had created for her. When her family saw it they would love it. They all loved reading and had rooms set up for it. She was the only one who hadn't got

around to finishing how she wanted it, despite them urging her to do it. She leaned up, kissed him then hugged him in return.

"Thanks. Now back to work and let me enjoy what you did." She released him, slapping him on the butt. "I don't know how you did all this so fast."

Ian pushed his butt back against her hand. He walked back to the table where he had been working.

"Jalil helped me with the bookcases. He and Rueben installed them. I went to Khalida and told her what I wanted and she happened to have some pieces in the store."

Sinai ran her hands along the bookcases. She recognised the style of her brother Jalil's work. He designed furniture. She picked up a wood figurine and could tell it was one of Uncle Inus's. Picking a book, she went over to the burgundy couch. Changing her mind, she sat on the chocolate brown couch instead. Pulling her one leg under her she sat back. Khalida knew her tastes very well. Khalida ran a store that carried custom made furniture and other furnishing. She carried all their family's art work and various creative things they did. Khalida was also sort of the manager who people went to when they wanted something custom made or to carry some of the art or furniture the various family members made. The uncles' wood carvings were really popular and always in demand.

A sound made her look up. Ian was bent over a microscope. She studied his back and smiled. It was nice being here together.

It's only temporary.

Sinai lowered her head and read her book. Something wavered from the corner of her eyes. Turning her head she stilled. A blackish cloud in the shape of a man seemed to be sitting next to her. She couldn't make out the features. Its eyes flashed and it looked back at what seemed to be a book from her bookshelf. The being lifted it and showed her the cover. Sinai raised an eyebrow as she read the title "The Lion's Lady" by Julie Garwood. It was one of her favourites.

"Mess up my book and I will kill you," Sinai promised.

The being stiffened then a strangely hypnotic voice sounded in her mind. "*Books aren't to be fucked with.*"

"*I'm surprised you like to read,*" she responded the same way.

"*There is a lot you don't know about me. Now shut the hell up, I am reading.*" The being lowered the book and bent its head back to read.

"Maybe I should just kill you now before you come for me." Sinai wondered how she could be talking so calmly to the being that had hurt so many of her family. She had to have lost her mind.

"You are quite sane. Now can't we just get along and enjoy this wonderful thing your kitty cat did for you?"

Sinai raised her eyebrow at what he called Ian. A growling sound captured her attention. She looked over at Ian. He was standing at his table looking at her and the being.

"It's okay, Ian. Go back to work. Me and the death dude will just stay here and read. We can act friendly. At least for now."

Ian didn't sit. He took a step towards them.

"Here, kitty, kitty. Make nice." Mocking laughter sounded in her head.

Ian growled again.

"Behave or give me back my book," Sinai said.

"He started it. I just wanted to read."

The being folded its hands and she could swear it seemed to be pouting. Sinai rolled her eyes then motioned Ian back. Ian glared but returned to the table. She studied the being once more. It flashed frightening teeth and red glowing eyes then continued reading. Sinai turned her attention to her book. A while later she stretched. Noting the being was gone Sinai frowned when she didn't see the book it had been reading. Standing, she searched the books on the shelves, muttering.

"What's wrong?" Ian asked.

"The fucker stole my book," Sinai hissed.

Ian caught the soap that appeared.

"That's what you get for having a reading hour with a death demon." His lips twitched.

Ian went to his worktable.

"I want my book, you book thief," Sinai said.

Ian laughed. A black shape formed by the door. The demon did its usual spin and flicked the tails of its shirt and, using the book, gave a salute then walked out the door. Sinai sat back on the couch and fumed over her stolen book.

"No one said he was a book thief," Sinai said.

Ian laughed harder, falling off the stool he was sitting on. Sinai huffed, glaring as she fumed on the couch.

* * * *

Sinai drank her tea and watched as Ian made Ianis B Special. He moved with efficient movements. It was so graceful and sexy, the way he made the intricate design. He'd tried to show her, but she couldn't get it. His friends all had it, but for the life of her she couldn't figure it out, no matter how many times he explained it.

"How'd you come up with that and the design?"

Ian stopped, a smile on his face. "By accident. We all have a wicked sweet tooth, and all have different flavours we like. Pandora, like me, loves pecans. Sin and Savage go crazy over strawberries. And Wes is a big chocolate lover." Ian paused, then cleared his throat.

His expressionless face didn't fool her. It bothered him Wesley was still not speaking to any of them. Sinai took a bite of the pastry, then put it down.

"I see when you make it, but there is a little something extra in it I can't place."

Ian came over to her and spoke into her ear.

"It's coconut extract. It reminded me of you. I made it for the people who are always on my mind."

Sinai looked at him sharply. Ian smiled and kissed her softly. She stood and went into his arms. Ian held her between his legs and kissed her thoroughly, then leaned away, eyes twinkling

"I named it after you," he said quietly.

Sinai frowned, then she chuckled. "Ianis is Sinai spelled backwards. I thought it was named after you."

"The whole thing means Sinai Blackstone Special. Just didn't use the whole of your last name. That would have been too obvious." Ian shifted, looking uncomfortable.

Sinai wanted to rag him on it, but resisted. Instead, she said, "Special in a good or bad way?"

Ian's eyes twinkled. "It goes according to the mood you have me in."

"Hey." She slapped his chest.

Ian captured her hand and kissed her fingers. "These days, it's a good thing."

"That's just because you're getting sex," Sinai said.

"Maybe." Ian kissed her again.

Sinai murmured and leaned in to him.

"Get a fucking room," Pandora growled.

Sinai kissed Ian harder, then released him. She glanced at Pandora and flipped her off. Pandora stomped over to the sink. Sin came over and kissed Sinai's cheek. Ian growled. She ignored him and kissed Sin on the cheek. He walked away. Savage came up and did the same. She returned it, kissing his cheek, too. Savage slapped Ian on the shoulder and went to his brother.

"They're always touching you, and you let them," Ian grumbled.

Sinai chuckled and turned to him. "But it's you I sleep with."

A gagging sound came. Sinai eyed Pandora and took a step towards her. Ian gripped her around the waist and led her to the door. Sinai frowned and pouted. She went with him. He led her to the SUV, kissed her, then put her into the car.

"Be good." He touched her face through the window of the SUV.

Sinai snapped her teeth at his fingers. He laughed, tapped the roof, and stepped back. Sinai started her car, tooted her horn, and drove out of the lot. She went onto the road and towards the station. In a few minutes, she reached it, but instead of pulling in, she pressed the gas. In another half an hour, she parked, then got out of her car. Staring up at the building, she reached out with her senses. Finding what she was looking for, Sinai levitated. At the window she was looking for Sinai made a ball-like motion of her hand, building power. She pushed out fast with both hands and threw the power, then flew after it. The ball hit a second before she reached it, shattering the glass. Sinai landed on her feet on the carpet. The glass rained down around her. She strutted forwards towards the desk.

Chapter Six

The man behind the desk didn't move away from the falling glass. Sinai waved her hand and stalled it in the air over his head.

"To what do I owe this very dramatic call?" Wesley asked dryly.

Sinai narrowed her eyes. "Stop acting like an ass, Wesley, and talk to Ian."

Wesley leant forwards and said furiously, "It's none of your business."

"It is my business when you continuing to act like a petulant child is hurting him."

Wesley made a mocking sound. "Aw. You have to fight Ian's battles now. What a good little woman you are."

Sinai flicked her wrist, releasing the glass. It rained from the sky.

"*Nai!*" a voice cried.

The glass disintegrated. Sinai didn't even look towards Peyton. She heard Peyton's steps behind her.

"You could have hurt him." Peyton smacked her on the shoulder.

"I knew you would be a good little woman, feel his fear, and save him," Sinai said bitterly.

Peyton turned Sinai to face her. Her eyes were narrowed.

"What the hell did you just say?" Peyton caught the bar of soap that appeared.

"Just repeating what your man said." Sinai bared her teeth.

"He what?" Peyton turned and threw the soap.

Wesley's hand flashed out and caught it. "You should be pissed at her. Coming into my office the way she did. Acting like she owns the place."

"You know, Wesley, you're being a real prick. And I wouldn't have to be here if you would act your age and talk to Ian."

"What is she talking about? I thought you straightened this shit out with Ian and the others." Peyton put her hands on her hips.

Sinai caught the soap for her. She held it out. Peyton snatched it and threw it at Wesley. He caught it again and put it on his desk.

"I will, in my time."

"You know you miss them, but pride is stopping you from clearing this up. Get over it and go to them," Peyton said.

"When I want to." Wesley looked stubborn.

Sinai rolled her eyes. It was reminiscent of Ian's response and look.

"Wesley," Peyton said, going over to him.

"Peyton," he said, then glared at Sinai. "You like to stir things up. Get out."

Sinai strolled over to the window and jumped out. She floated and watched Wesley, smiling smugly.

"Fix my damn window!" Wesley called.

He caught the soap and put it on the desk.

"Have your good little woman do it," Sinai said sweetly.

Peyton smacked him on the shoulder. "I can't believe you said that."

"I didn't mean it. She just—" Wesley blushed, looking sheepish.

"The blushing won't distract me this time." Peyton made a rude noise.

Wesley formed a sorry face and edged over to Peyton. Sinai chuckled and floated to the ground. Served Wesley right that he would have to deal with Peyton. It had taken a while for Sinai to figure out Peyton didn't know Wesley was acting stupid. She had let it go for a while, telling herself they would work it out. But she knew it ate at Ian. Sinai landed next to her car. She got in and went back to work, whistling.

Ian kissed Sinai on the side of her neck as she lay next to him on the couch. He focused back on "The Closer". The doorbell sounded, shattering the silence. He paused the show, then nudged Sinai.

"Go answer it."

Sinai glared and shook her head. "I'm not expecting anyone. You go."

"It's your house," Ian pointed out.

"So? I'm not getting up," Sinai said.

Ian shrugged and didn't move. The doorbell sounded again.

"I hope they go away. I wanna see my show," Ian said.

"If you would answer the door like normal folks, the doorbell would stop," Peyton said dryly.

Ian sat up, staring not at her, but at Wesley standing next to her. Sinai moved, getting up. She stopped in front of Wesley and gave him a look that was clearly a warning, then left the room.

"Now be nice," Peyton said. "Both of you."

Ian eyed her. "Ask your sister about the demon coming for her."

Peyton's eyes narrowed, and she stomped off. "*Sinai*."

Ian chuckled. He sobered when he looked at Wesley. Wesley came over and sat next to him. Ian crossed his arms over his chest. Wesley blew out a breath, then bent his knee, turning to face him.

"We've been friends a long time, Ian."

"I know."

"Well, we shouldn't have let this come between us. Sinai made me see —"

"Wait. What does Sinai have to do with this?"

Wesley smiled. "You have a good little woman."

Ian raised his eyebrow. "Please tell me you didn't call her that."

Wesley nodded.

"And you're still standing," Ian said in awe.

Wesley laughed. "She took it as part of my delusional state and didn't hurt me."

Ian snorted. Wesley was lucky. Sinai didn't suffer crap. They were silent for a bit.

Wesley broke the silence. "I don't care what you are. It pissed me off that you all knew about each other from the beginning, and left me out."

"We didn't know about each other from the start. When we met, Pandora might have known, but she never said anything. But then, she's freaky like that. Sin and Savage found out when we were in that special programme with Dr Abrams. The one only we made it through. It was hellish, and...well, our control was weak."

Wesley frowned. "How could I not see it, not know this about you all?"

"When you're different, you learn to hide it if you need to. Which we did, out there in the world. I didn't mean to not ever tell you, Wes. There was just never a good time." Ian shrugged.

Wesley cocked his head. "I was a jerk. Should have come and talked about this before." A blush flushed across his cheek.

"Yeah, you should have." Ian reached out and smacked him across the head.

Wesley relaxed, and they chuckled. Nothing else needed to be said on the subject.

"Are you all so smart because of your power?" Wesley asked.

"I wish it was that easy. Wouldn't have had to study so much. If smarts went by powers, the world would be in a boat load of trouble. Thankfully, that's not the way it works," Ian said.

He shuddered to even think of it being that way.

"I have to apologise to the others," Wesley said.

"Enough of this sap, already. Are we gonna watch Brenda solve the crime, then make the criminal cry, or what?" Pandora asked, shimmering into the chair across from them. Sin and Savage appeared, walking past Wesley and squeezing his shoulder. Sin took a seat on the chair and Savage sat on the floor. Ian smiled. He knew it was their way of saying no apology was necessary. Since they had come to Blackstone, they usually watched "The Closer" together. He had missed watching with them. Although Sinai liked the show, it just wasn't the same.

"You should have fucking told us, Sinai!" Peyton yelled.

"It's my problem!" Sinai yelled back.

She stormed into the room, Peyton hot on her heels. Peyton grabbed her arm and turned Sinai to face her.

"Leave it alone," Sinai hissed.

"No. Do you remember a conversation about me being self-sacrificing? And you saying you wouldn't be so accommodating? Well, I remember it, and this shit stops now," Peyton growled.

She snatched the soap and flung it against the wall.

"Damn. I need some popcorn. This is good," Pandora said.

"What the hell are you doing in my house?" Sinai glared.

"Ian lives here, so I'm visiting him." Pandora tapped her finger on her lip. "You, on the other hand, are entertaining me. Thanks for the show."

Sinai took a step towards her.

"You can fight with Pan later. You'll have to explain this to Mom." Peyton grabbed her, and they shimmered.

"Oh, shit. Not another lecture," Sinai moaned, then pointed at Ian. "This is your fault."

Ian stifled a smile. Sinai faded.

"Well, back to 'The Closer'," Ian said, unpausing the TV.

"You are so going to get it when she gets back," Wesley said.

"I know." Ian laughed.

"You're crazy," Wesley said.

"He has to be crazy to be involved with that woman," Pandora pointed out.

Ian said nothing, just focused on the show. He leant back. Sinai had interfered and put their friendship back together. She might act like she didn't give a crap about Pandora, but knowing Sinai, she figured once things were repaired between Wesley and him, Pan and the others would be involved too.

After the show, they watched a few others he had DVRed. Then they left, and Sinai still hadn't returned. Ian went up and got ready for bed. Crawling into the bed, he laid down, waiting. He fell asleep.

Ian gasped, waking violently aroused. A warm mouth sucked on his cock. He glanced down, and Sinai raised amber eyes to his. She suckled him hard and played with his balls. Her nails scraped along the sensitive flesh. She hummed and went down on him deeper. She relaxed her throat and swallowed. Ian jerked, and his cock swelled. Sinai released his cock from her mouth, tightening her hands on the base. Ian groaned as his orgasm receded.

Sinai leaned over him and guided his cock to her pussy. She rocked forwards and took him in. She rode him urgently and grunted with each movement of her hips. Ian gripped her hips. Sinai tightened around him, and his release raced over him. His balls went tight, and his cock jerked as he came. Sinai gasped and shuddered as she joined him

She slumped against him. Ian hugged her to his chest.

"I thought you were pissed at me," Ian said when he caught his breath.

"I was. But I needed to work off some frustration from the lecture you made me get."

Ian saw the pout on her face. He laughed and kissed her. Sinai returned it. He rolled her over on her back and stroked into her.

* * * *

Ian took a sip of his beer and looked around. The Blackstone gathering welcoming him to the fold was in full swing. He was technically already considered family, but the party was for him and Sinai getting together.

The sun shone on the knives the uncles were readying to throw. The aunts were still clothed. Sinai's cousins and siblings were milling around, talking with each other. Ian shifted in his chair and stretched his legs before him.

"Here," Wesley said.

Ian drained the little beer he had left, putting the empty container on the ground next to his chair, and took the full one Wesley offered. Wesley sat in the chair next to him. They drank as they looked at the Blackstone clan having fun.

"I don't know how they do it, knowing what Sinai might have to face shortly."

Ian grunted. Wesley was stating what he was thinking. Ian looked over at Sinai. She smiled at him, then went back to talking to Sabra. He shifted. Now the family knew, they had shifted their focus to getting Sinai ready in case she had to face the death demon. It was all they could do. The wait was aggravating. Since the family had found out, they hadn't seen anything of the demon. It was weird, after it being around so often.

"Ian and Wesley! Your turn."

"Coming, Uncle Inus!" Ian called.

He and Wesley stood and went over to the uncles. It was a tag-team knife-throwing competition. Wesley and Ian were partnered. Absently, Ian took the knife they gave him. He glanced at Sinai. She made a shooing motion. He focused on the competition.

Sinai's brothers Jalil and Rueben won. After the winner was announced, Ian leaned against a tree. The sun was getting ready to go down. Sinai walked over to him. Her sensual grace filled all his senses. Coconut and shea butter wafted across his nostrils. She leaned against his chest and kissed him. Ian ignored the teasing from the family. Sinai withdrew and looked at him.

"You ready?" Ian asked.

Sinai nodded. He pulled her with him into the trees. Ian turned and ran, holding her hand. Sinai laughed and ran, matching him step for step. A flash of white and black streaked by him. Ian roared at his clan mate. More and more of them flowed through the trees, joining them. The roars of the tigers echoed through the forest. He leant back his head as he ran and screamed with them.

Sinai's breath caught at the beauty of Ian's roar. The other white tigers joined him, their roars rising in a cacophony of sound. Ian stopped, released her hand, and in a blink, he

shifted. Sinai reached out and touched him. His plush fur tickled her fingers. He rubbed against her hand and purred. Ian circled her playfully. He pushed her with his head. Taking the hint, she started to run. He went with her. His movements were powerful and sleek. She used her power to keep up with him. Startled, Sinai realised she wasn't using that much.

"It is your astral beast who is helping you run," Ian said.

Sinai nodded and enjoyed the feeling of freedom. She spotted Ian's parents as they ran in front of them. They roared, agreeing, and took off. They went to the head of the line. The rest of his clan went in behind them, falling in around Ian and Sinai. They ran with the clan, and Sinai felt their welcome. As the day slipped into night, they moved in the forest.

"See as I see. Hear as I hear."

Her vision became sharp, and her hearing acute. Sinai could see clearly every tree, branch, leaf and particle around her. The sounds were heightened. She embraced the gift Ian had given her. Her body flowed in time with his. They moved around trees and jumped over obstacles. The forest sang with them, tracking their passage. They slowed, and the white tigers parted for Ian and Sinai. Reaching the ledge, Ian in his tiger form sat. Sinai sat next to him. She glanced at the other tigers sitting spread out next to and behind them on the ledge. Sinai looked forwards and leaned against Ian. From the highest peak in the Blackstone Mountains, she could see all the beauty that was Blackstone Haven.

Ian shifted and hugged her. Sinai cuddled into him as they sat in the moonlight. As hours passed, the night shrouded them in an eerie glow.

"Happy Birthday, Nai," Ian whispered.

Sinai smiled grimly and hugged him. It was after midnight, meaning it was August fifteenth. The day. Now, they had to wait to see if the demon came for them. Later, as the sun rose, Sinai and Ian walked out of the forest and across the area towards her house. They paused and looked up at the rising sun. Sinai closed her eyes, feeling it on her face. Ian rubbed his cheek against her. She opened her eyes and smiled at him.

Grabbing his hand, she pulled him with her and up the steps into the house. She ran up the stairs and down the hall to her bedroom, drawing him with her across the room and onto the balcony. Sinai led him to the lounge chair and pushed him down on it. She stripped him with a thought, then herself. Sinai reached for her hair, releasing it from its braid. Ian put one foot on the floor, then stroked his cock. Sinai walked over to him and straddled him. She kissed him, licking along his lips and inside his mouth. The taste of Ian coated her tongue.

She withdrew and shifted. The head of his cock rubbed against her slit. Sinai shivered. She moved and took him in. Sinai sighed as he filled her up and up. Ian flexed up and into her. She moved slowly, bracing her hands on the top of the lounge chair. Ian sighed and held her ass firmly. He licked along her neck, then bit her gently. Sinai shivered. Suddenly, Ian pulled her off him, then turned.

He put her hands on the top of the chair. He pressed his over hers, holding her in place. Sinai moaned. Ian rubbed against her ass, his legs spreading her. He slipped inside her cunt. Sinai whimpered. Ian moved inside her in a slow, sensual glide. She leaned her head back on his shoulder. Ian licked along the side of her face, pumping into her in that steady motion. It was deliberately slow and deep.

Sinai gripped the chair and leaned her head forwards. She rocked back against him, countering his movements. Ian growled and nuzzled into her hair. His hot breath wafted against her neck. His teeth scraped along it. Shivering, Sinai rolled her hips slowly. Ian bit down sharply. Sinai moaned loudly and bucked. Ian's hands held her in place. He bit the nape of her neck, and he took her.

A flash of her phantom tiger and his filled her closed eyes. She whimpered and gushed wetness. Ian kept his pace, going deeper and deeper. In a wash of heat, her orgasm came over her in a soft rush. Her hair stood on edge, and his teeth seemed to light a fire down her spine. Ian's hands tightened on hers, and he came in hot pulses. Sinai gasped. He held her, releasing her from his bite. Ian lifted her and took her inside, placing her on the bed. He walked away. She heard water, then he was back. He lifted her again and took her into the bathroom. Ian got into her whirlpool tub, holding her. He sat and arranged her so her back was against his chest. Sinai floated as he cleaned her off.

"Are you sure you just want to stay in today?"

"Yeah. I just want to spend the day with you," Sinai replied.

Ian kissed the side of her neck. They relaxed as he held her.

* * * *

"Here's your drink," Ian said.

Sinai took it and sipped. She looked out the window to her yard. The moonlight made everything seem surreal.

"Just a few more minutes, and then you're done," Ian said softly.

Sinai frowned. It had been an anticlimactic day. Nothing all day. She had spent time with Ian, which was good. But nothing had happened, which was...strange. Ian stepped back and walked away. Sinai tensed, knowing that these next few minutes would feel like a lifetime.

"Come on and sit with me."

Sinai went over and joined him on the couch. Ian pulled her against his body. She sat between his legs and leant back on his chest. Ian put his hands around her waist. Sinai watched the clock. As the seconds ticked by, she got more and more tense. With one minute to go, she turned and kissed Ian. He returned it hungrily. She withdrew and looked back at the clock.

"Thirty seconds." She turned to him, joy filling her.

Sinai gasped. Ian slumped back, his body covered in a black cloud. His body shimmered and disappeared.

"You're supposed to take me!" Sinai screamed.

"A change of plans." A mocking laugh filled the air.

Sinai stood, glaring at the man who shimmered into view. His eyes glowed a pale green, and his white hair seemed to move around him. His features, formed by a master artisan, were devastatingly handsome. He smiled, an endearing grin.

His name came to her in that moment. "You're supposed to take me, Lethra."

It resonated within her family. She could feel their awareness of what was happening.

"Tick, tock. You have ten seconds to find Ian, or he's mine." Lethra flicked the tails of his suit, then did a twirl and disappeared.

She tried to think where he could have taken Ian. Sinai looked at the clock and saw the seconds ticking away.

Chapter Seven

A warning blasted through Ian. His beast thrashed, bringing him to full consciousness. His eyes flashed open. A man with his legs crossed in a sitting position, his hand under his chin, hovered over Ian's chest. The man smiled widely. It seemed playful.

"Shape shifters fascinate me. There isn't much they fear. And they would rather die than show it." The man paused and leaned his head to the side, studying Ian with pale green eyes. "But there's something about you that is more than shifter. I can taste it. It's not like that human Peyton hooked up with." He shook his head, his white hair shifting, making a sizzling sound. "The Blackstone women's taste is really deteriorating. Present company excluded, of course. That Wesley character, he's just a human."

Ian flexed his arms as he spoke. "A human who kicked your butt."

The man blinked, a slow closing then opening of his lids, which were surrounded by curly white lashes.

He chuckled, then started to spin in circles. "That was a good one."

Ian went to grab him. The man stopped, facing him.

"Don't waste your time. You can't move unless I want you to."

"Will you if I ask?" Ian asked.

"Try me and see. Do it nicely. I need to be wooed." The man gave a bashful look.

Ian growled.

"Be nice, kitty." The man wagged a finger in his face. Ian snapped his teeth at the finger, but it was just out of reach.

"Let me go," Ian said softly.

The man shivered. "Oooh...that made me so afraid. Wait. Let me shiver again." He shook, then started to laugh.

The joyous sound seemed at odds with what he was.

"I assume you're the death demon."

The demon sobered. "You know what they say about assumptions." Then he put his hand under his chin again before he continued. "It's rude of me not to introduce myself. My manners are lacking." He lowered his lashes and gave Ian a coy look. "I'm so ashamed."

Ian snorted. The demon grinned, then chuckled.

"Then again, I don't have any. Shame, that is."

Ian sighed. "Do you always talk this much, or am I special?"

The man put his head back and laughed, then went deadly serious. "When you're stuck in hell alone with no one to talk to, you'd talk when you got the chance, too." He flashed a smile. "Then again, maybe it's my way of confusing you. I don't know myself. I'm confused, too." He laughed again.

The demon started to spin in a circle again. Ian closed his eyes and groaned.

"I'm in hell. With a talkative demon. Just let me go."

"See? All you had to do was ask."

Ian's eyes flashed open. He sat up. Confused, he looked around the familiar surroundings.

"You know, these things are so interesting."

He looked over at the demon. Ian frowned as the demon spread the pecans, strawberries and chocolate on the dough, then made the intricate design of the Ianis B Special. He held it up and grinned. Ian jumped off the metal counter and flew at him. He grabbed him, and the man disappeared. Ian glanced at the pastry he held.

"No fear," the demon said.

Ian swung around. The demon floated, hand under chin with legs crossed in a sitting position, over the table Ian had been on. Ian jumped at him. He poofed out again. Ian rolled off the table and flipped, landing on his feet facing the table. The demon shimmered into view in the same pose.

"I can do this all day. Well, more like forever." He clapped his hands. "And we can have such fun. Tick, tock goes the clock." The demon spun around in a circle.

Ian growled and lengthened his nails. The demon stopped and hooted.

"Ohh...Wolverine is in the house."

Ian growled. "I'm not an X-Man."

"Talons and surly attitude. Sounds like Wolverine to me."

"Does that make you the Joker?" Ian countered.

"I'm so much better than him." The demon looked offended.

Ian sighed. The demon grinned cheekily. He lowered to the table and sat on the edge.

"Joker can't do this." The demon made a growling sound.

Ian's beast shuddered, fighting to get out. The demon made a whooshing movement of his hand. Nails grew out of his fingers. The demon waved them at Ian, then looked at them.

"Awesome, huh?"

"Sure, Joker. Whatever you say," Ian said dryly.

The demon frowned. "Why do you keep calling me that? I don't like it."

"I don't know your name. So Joker it is."

The demon pursed his lips. "Oops, my manners." He jumped off the table and walked over to Ian. It was arrogant and meant to intimidate. Ian stood his ground. The demon stopped.

"Lethra, at your service." He spun and flicked the tails of his shirt.

Ian grunted. It was the same manoeuvre he'd seen when the demon had been paying his visits to Sinai. Lethra slid towards him. Ian shifted to the side and slashed out with his talons. Lethra puffed out, his mocking laughter echoing in the room. He appeared floating as he had before, over the table.

"Tick, tock. You'll be with me," Lethra said.

He flipped in the air, then landed on the floor next to the table. Lethra pulled a bowl to him and dumped out the dough. He started to assemble Ianis B Special. Ian came closer to the table.

"It really is so precious that you named this" —he held up a completed pastry, then placed it on the tray he was filling up — "after Sinai. You two kids are such fun to watch."

Ian rolled his eyes. He wished the demon would just shut up and get on with the fight.

"In my own time, Ian. Be patient," Lethra said as he made the pastries.

He lifted the filled tray and took it to the oven, placing it inside. He came back to the table and made more.

"Unless you're invited, you shouldn't take over a chef's kitchen," Ian stated.

"This is my kitchen, not yours," Lethra said cheerfully.

Ian looked around the kitchen of Sinfully McIntyre, then back at him.

"Looks like mine to me."

"Look beyond what the eyes can see," Lethra replied.

Ian stiffened at the words. Sinai had mentioned it was the warning Grayson sent.

Lethra laughed, then leaned against the table. "Ahh...they have been bad. Trying to figure things out. I blame you. Damn shape shifters don't know how to wait for things to happen."

Ian said silkily, "You have no control over me."

"I don't need to control you. I get to keep you, like a nice pet. I always wanted a kitty cat." Lethra smiled.

Ian was getting fed up with that grin. Lethra laughed and did his spin, flicking his shirt. Ian went around the table and swiped at him. Lethra disappeared, his laughter sounding again. Ian pounded his fist on the counter and swiped the bowl. It flew off the table, but stopped, hovering, over the floor.

"That's no way to treat good dough." Lethra shimmered into view and frowned.

He put it on the table. Lethra glanced at the clock and smiled. He started to make more pastries. Ian frowned and looked at the clock. It was five seconds until midnight. It wasn't possible. Lethra had been messing with him longer than a few seconds.

"Time is relative here. Don't I know it." Lethra sounded bitter.

Ian glanced at him sharply. There was grimness on his face. It cleared so fast, Ian wondered if he'd imagined it.

"You know the one thing I like about shape shifters? They don't fear." He paused, then said, "But they sacrifice real well. Especially for their mates."

Ian stiffened. He would do anything for Sinai. It was his way, not just his beast.

"I was actually shocked you all were mates. But I've got to say, you two went at it with such vigour." Lethra wiggled his eyebrows. "It was awe-inspiring."

"Spying on me will only make me want to kill you more."

Lethra looked affronted. "I was spying on Sinai. That is one fine woman. If only things were different, I would get with that."

Ian growled, a loud rumbling sound. Lethra matched it. Ian increased his resonance, and Lethra matched it. They got louder and louder. Lethra stopped, then leaned on the counter, laughing hysterically. Ian stopped and stared at him. Lethra wiped his wet eyes.

"Man, you're funny. What were you trying to do, deafen me to kill me?" He chuckled. "No one has tried that yet. Maybe it'll work. Not."

Ian sighed. "You really are annoying."

"I know. It's a gift," Lethra said, looking at his nails.

Ian watched him, attempting to figure out what the demon was trying to do. Lethra looked at the clock again and made a tsking sound.

"I really thought she would move the world to come for you. How disappointing," Lethra said.

Ian glanced at the clock and noted it was one second to midnight. He glanced back at Lethra.

"What do you mean?"

"Sinai, your supposed mate. Useless woman. She didn't even try to find you." Lethra eyed him. "Maybe she doesn't care about you after all. But it doesn't matter. Now I get to keep you." Lethra smiled, a chilling grin. "Freedom is mine. And you will be the new challenge the Blackstones will face. It's poetic justice."

Ian's eyes narrowed. "You can't just keep me here and get free. The Blackstones locked you here, and here you will stay."

Lethra moved forwards, more of a flowing motion than a walk. Fog rolled around him as he moved. Something about it niggled at Ian's thoughts. Lethra's words distracted the thought from forming.

"Look beyond what the eye can see. The Blackstones believe whatever my master chooses for them to know. I am but a puppet to see through his will." The trace of bitterness was in Lethra's tone again. In a singsong tone, he said, "*Death stalks you, waiting for the weakness to strike and take what you hold most dear.*" He continued in a normal voice. "What a load of crap. Sinai couldn't even care to come to you. That shows how dear you are to her. I'm out, and you're the new death." Lethra laughed.

He whistled, walking away.

"Hey, Lethra?" Ian asked.

"What, kitty cat?"

"What do you hold most dear?"

Lethra stiffened and turned to him. "None of your business."

"Come on. You're all talkative and sharing. Share this. Or are you afraid, Joker?" Ian mocked.

"I fear no one," Lethra said,

Ian made a 'come on' gesture. Lethra came closer and hissed.

"Life. I want life again."

"But you can't have it since you're dead."

Lethra's eyes narrowed. "The in-between has rattled your brain."

Ian smiled. "I'm thinking real clear."

Ian shifted back, and Sinai flashed from under the table. In a flare of power, she brought up the crossbow with a life arrow. She shot Lethra in the chest. In quick succession, she made more arrows and continued to shoot the demon. Lethra stumbled back as the arrows hit him. He fell onto his back, arms spread. There seemed to be hundreds of arrows in his chest. He looked at Sinai. She held the bow firmly. She was in her hunting clothing—a skin-tight body suit and boots. She inclined her head to him. Ian grinned.

"Ever hear the expression, 'In the nick of time'?"

Sinai made a rude sound. "I saved your ass. Say thanks."

He went over to her and kissed her. "Thanks."

"The life arrows worked," Sinai said. "It's over. The family can finally rest."

There was such emotion in her voice, he hugged her.

Sinai leaned against Ian. Her heart raced as she thought about almost losing him. It had taken her agonising moments to figure out where Lethra could have taken him. Coming in without alerting Lethra had been a delicate procedure. But she had pulled it off. She glanced back at his body and tightened her grip on the bow. She wanted to put even more arrows in his chest for all the pain he had caused her family.

"He's gone. Let it go," Ian said.

Sinai turned to him. He held her and kissed her cheek. They walked towards the door. Mocking laughter made Sinai's heart clench. She swung around.

"That tickled." Lethra laughed, then flowed to his feet.

He ran his hand over his chest, and the arrows disintegrated.

"You ruined my shirt." Lethra frowned.

"It's not possible. I used the strongest life arrow. Hundreds of them. You should be dead, death demon," Sinai hissed.

"I would be, if I was a death demon." Lethra looked at her, his light green eyes glowing.

He flew at her fast. Sinai gasped as he hit her in the chest, sending her flying. Ian roared, and Lethra laughed. Sinai rolled to her feet and watched as Lethra lifted Ian like he was a rag doll, then slammed him on the steel table. It buckled under the force. Lethra pulled

Ian up and flung him at the freezer. The door gave under his body, and Ian disappeared into the freezer. Lethra turned to her and smiled. He put his hands up and did a shimmy. Sinai narrowed her eyes and flung her hand out with a blast of power.

Lethra made a scooping movement of his hand and caught it. He spun around and bounced it in his hand. She could feel the increase of power with each bounce. Lethra turned to her, and he dropped it, kicking it around in the air with his feet, keeping it just above the ground. He balanced it on the tip of his shoe, then kicked it in the air, then kicked out his foot. Sinai jumped out of the way. The blast whooshed by her face. She felt the sizzle.

Sinai looked at the wall, and the power spread over it. It made an undulating movement as it coated the wall.

"It's good to have powers again," Lethra crowed.

Sinai looked at him. Lethra twirled and flicked out the tails of his shirt. He frowned at the hole in it. He made a motion with his hand over it, and it was as good as new. He looked up at her. His hair made a slithering sound, then he smiled.

"I learned from last time. Being human sucked. But thanks to Peyton and that worthless human, I got some powers back," Lethra said.

He rolled his neck, then laced his fingers and flexed them. Lethra jumped up and down, kicking out each leg. He put his hands over his head, then made a pleased sound. He stood straight and gave an endearing grin.

"I'm going to enjoy this."

Lethra turned and caught Ian as he came up behind him. He kicked straight, and Ian flew up to the ceiling, hitting it. He fell down, and Lethra punched out with a fist. Ian flew back into the freezer. Lethra laughed, then turned to Sinai. He crossed his arms over his chest. Sinai watched him cautiously. From his words, he wasn't a death demon. But what the hell was he?

"Wouldn't you like to know? A being doesn't tell his secrets." He partially lowered his lids over his eyes. "Unless you treat him nicely."

"What are you?" Sinai asked.

He wagged his finger. "Uh-uh. That's not nicely."

Sinai glared.

"You're a spitfire. I'm going to love killing you." Lethra laughed.

"I'm not that easy to kill," Sinai replied.

She pulled power, formed a whip with it, and lashed out at him. Lethra stood still as it wrapped around him.

"Is that all you got?" He raised an eyebrow

Sinai grinned viciously. "And this."

She called earth fire and threw it. It coated him, engulfing his body.

Lethra didn't move. "Ow. Ow. That hurts. Please release me. I bow to your greatness."

Sinai frowned. A boom rattled the kitchen, and Lethra stood unaffected. He studied his nails and sighed.

"I thought this would be more fun. But I'm bored." He made a raspberry. "Bored." Lethra looked at her. "Me being bored is not a good thing."

"I'm not here to entertain you," Sinai said.

"Why not?" Lethra looked baffled.

Sinai didn't know what to make of the demon. He seemed to be a few bricks shy of a load.

"I'm not crazy, Sinai. I'm very sane."

Sinai wondered how he could hear her thoughts.

"This is all mine." He made a sweeping gesture. "And you are a guest in my house."

He spun around and started to cha-cha. Sinai sighed. He didn't seem all that frightening. Lethra stopped and turned to her. A chilling expression came over his face.

"Look beyond what the eyes can see."

Sinai's eyes widened at the words from the message Grayson had sent. Lethra stalked towards her. Sinai threw power at him. He kept coming. Lethra gripped her throat and lifted her off her feet. She infused her power into him. He shuddered and purred.

"That feels good. Do it again," he whispered.

Lethra squeezed her neck. Sinai gasped as she fought for breath. Lethra's eyes glowed as he held her. His hair whipped around him. Sinai felt the burst of fur from a distance away. She screamed as her body convulsed, and amber flowed from her. Her astral cat filled her vision. Sinai looked past Lethra and saw Ian staggering out of the freezer. His phantom beast roared and ran to her amber. They merged in a wash of power. Sinai pushed out and broke Lethra's hold. Then she punched him in the chest. He skidded away and flipped, landing on his feet, facing her.

"Now things are about to get interesting," Lethra said.

"Brimstone fire!" Ian roared.

Sinai didn't question it. She trusted him and called it. It scorched her hands, eating at her. She placed her hands against her forehead, palms out. She infused it and blasted him. Lethra staggered back, his body rippling.

"How? No!" he roared as he disappeared with a loud boom.

Sinai staggered. Hard hands held her up. Blearily, she looked up at Ian. He held her.

"What was he?"

Sinai didn't know of any being that had to be killed with brimstone fire. Ian seemed grim, then looked at the spot where Lethra had been before returning his attention to her.

"I wouldn't have believed it if I didn't know a..." Ian trailed off, frowning.

"Know what?" Sinai demanded.

"I don't know what I was about to say." Ian frowned.

Sinai gripped him. "What?"

"Knowledge is not for you to have. It's only for me. I'll find out how you knew, and next time, the Blackstones won't be so lucky," Lethra's voice hissed.

Sinai stared at the glowing fog. It raced to them. They ducked out of the way. A mocking laugh followed, echoing in the room. The room shimmered, and the real Sinfully McIntyre kitchen came into view. The clock read five past twelve. Sinai couldn't believe it was just after midnight. After all they had gone through, it seemed much longer.

"I thought he was dead. Shouldn't what we did have killed him?" Ian asked.

"Why would—" Sinai stopped.

She didn't know what they had done. She didn't even remember the demon's name. Sinai slapped her hand on the wall. It was as it had always been: you survived, but with no knowledge to help the others. Sinai contacted her family telepathically to let them know they were okay.

"At least we made it," Ian said.

"We did. All we can hope is next time, the next Blackstone he faces will kill him forever." Sinai blew out a breath.

She took them to her house. Sinai glanced around her living room.

"Well, everything is over," Sinai said.

Ian frowned, then grunted. "I'll go and get my things."

He turned and went towards the door.

Sinai watched him go, then said, "I'm keeping the TV."

Ian stopped and faced her. "You're not keeping my TV."

She nodded, then added, "And your pets. Even Einstein."

Ian scowled. "You don't even like Einstein."

Sinai smiled. "Well, you'll just have to stay to keep peace between us, then."

Ian rolled his eyes and smirked. "You could just ask me to stay."

Sinai shrugged and put her hands in her back pockets. "That's up to you. I'm keeping your things."

She waved her hand. His living room furniture popped into the room, blending in with hers.

Ian sighed and came over to her. "If I check, will all my stuff be here?"

"Yep. I'm keeping it."

He stopped before her. "You could just admit you love me, Nai."

Sinai snorted. "Would I keep that ornery piece of kitty pest for any other reason?" She eyed the TV. "The TV, on the other hand, I love."

"You can say you love the TV, but not me?" Ian sounded exasperated.

Sinai smiled, then closed the distance between them. "I love you, Ian."

Ian murmured. "I know, Nai. I know."

He kissed her. She returned it for a few moments, then pushed him away. She strode off.

"Where are you going?" Ian asked.

She turned to face him and walked backwards. "To make friends with Einstein. If she's staying, she needs to know who's in charge."

"Glad you know she is."

Sinai narrowed her eyes. "I'm in charge, not her. And she will admit it."

"Good luck with that. Will you make friends with Pandora, too?" Ian asked.

Sinai stopped, then whined, "Do I have to?"

Ian grinned. "If you love me, you would."

Sinai studied him. "I'm gonna have to rethink this love thing."

Ian chuckled. "I love you, Nai."

"I know, Ian. I know." She pointed at him. "But I'm never going to be friends with Pandora."

"She grows on you," Ian said.

Sinai snorted. "Like a rash."

"Exactly." Ian walked over to her.

He pulled her in to his body.

"Life is funny. I didn't think I would have you, but I do. And we kicked death demon ass, too." Sinai grinned.

Ian snorted. "Hell, yeah, we did. It was meant for us to be together."

Ian caught the soap that appeared and threw it onto the table. Sinai smiled up at him.

"Instinct," Sinai said.

"Instinct," Ian agreed.

He kissed her.

"Let's go to bed. I'll deal with Einstein later," Sinai said.

She stepped back and slapped him on the butt. "Last one to bed will be in charge."

She turned and ran for the stairs, then up them. Sinai heard Ian running behind her. He caught her in the doorway of the bedroom.

"You let me win."

"I'm not a fool."

She laughed and went in. "Sma... Einstein!" Sinai screamed

She glared at the cat, who was gleefully shredding her blazer. Ian laughed. She turned the look at him.

"You're taking me shopping."

"I will." Ian hugged her. "Einstein, out."

The cat hissed and ran out of the room. Sinai closed the door. Ian led her to the bed, kissing her hungrily. Sinai let him manoeuvre her, content with her mate.

About the Author

Taige Crenshaw has been enthralled with the written word from the time she picked up her first book. It wasn't long before she started to make up her own tales of romance.

Her novels are set in the modern day between people who know what they want and how to get it. Taige also sets her stories in the future with vast universes between beautiful, strange and unique beings with lots of spice and sensuality added to her work.

Always hard at work creating new and exciting places Taige can be found curled up with a hot novel with exciting characters when she is not creating her own. Join her in the fun and frolic, with interesting people and far reaches of the world in her novels.

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